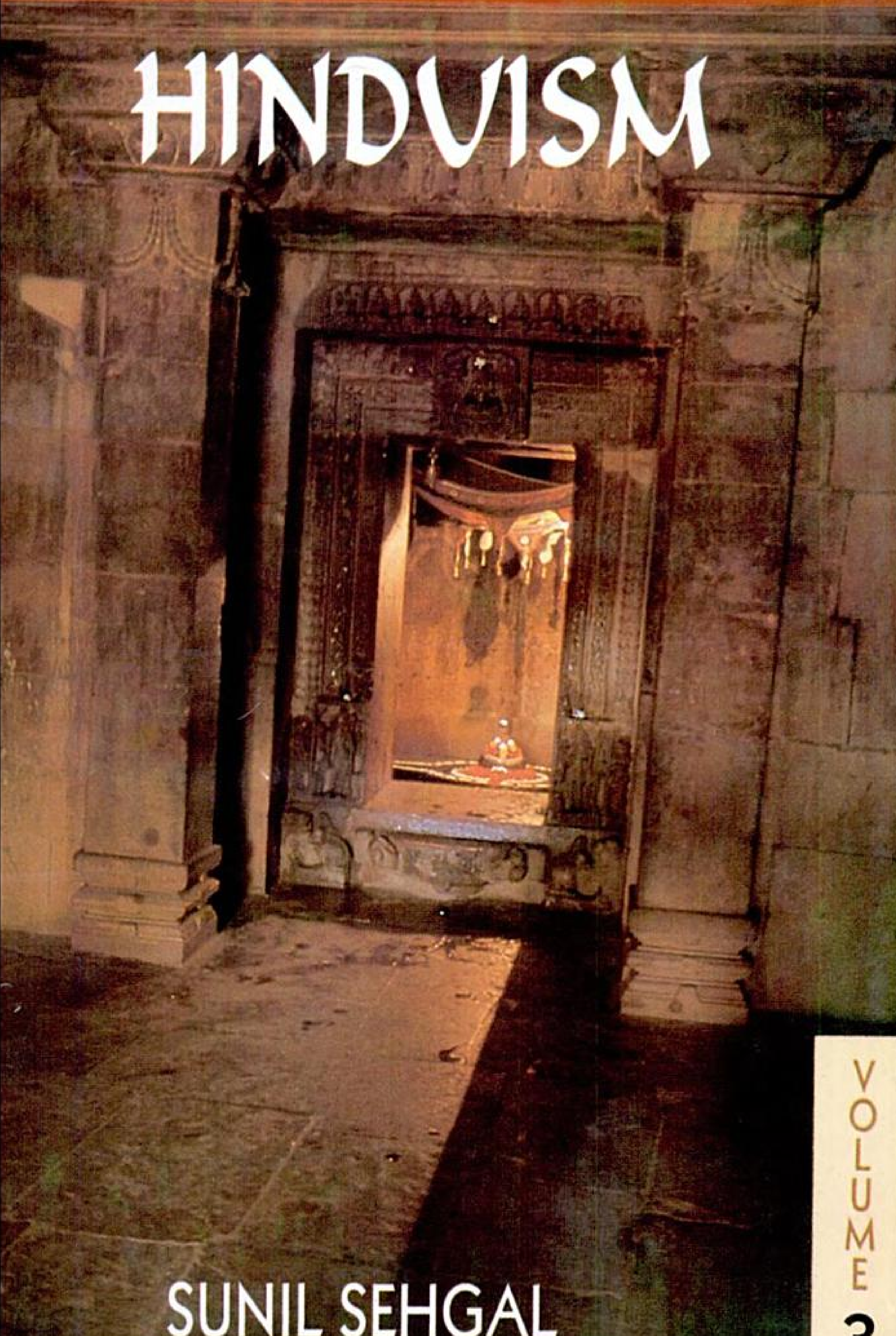
ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF HINDUISM



VOLUME 3

SUNIL SEHGAL

This multivolume Encyclopaedia is a pioneering attempt to bring together all aspects of Hinduism and contains so many multifarious things to afford us an insight into the deepest depths of the soul of Hinduism. This encyclopaedia is essentially a compilation of the terms and concepts covering various aspects of Hinduism. Many words borrowed for more general usage have been endowed with very special meaning. This encyclopaedia has been compiled, edited and arranged in alphabetical order by a keen scholar of Hinduism. In this encyclopaedia, Hinduism as a religion has been distinguished from Hinduism as a social organisation. On the one hand Hinduism regards god as a super fluity while on the other hand it sponsors a deeply emotional theism as the noblest form of religion. In this encyclopaedia, the entries have been represented in a clear and explanatory style to provide both straight forward definitions and invaluable background information. This encyclopaedia includes material from various Indian and foreign sources which has been compiled and edited by the author to make the set interesting.

This encyclopaedia is for the benefits of students, teachers, and research scholars as well as laymen who wish to know the key aspects of Hinduism as a religion as well as also a social organisation.

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Encyclopaedia of Hinduism

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Volume-3

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Preface

This multivolume Encyclopaedia is a pioneering attempt to bring together all aspects of Hinduism and contains so many multi farious things to afford us an insight into the deepest depths of the soul of Hinduism. This encyclopaedia is essentially a compilation of the terms and concepts covering various aspects of Hinduism. Many words borrowed for more general usage have been endowed with very special meaning. This encyclopaedia has been compiled, edited and arranged in alphabetical order by a keen scholar of Hinduism. In this encyclopaedia, Hinduism as a religion has been distinguished from Hinduism as a social organisation. On the one hand Hinduism regards god as a superfluity while on the other hand it sponsors a deeply emotional theism as the noblest form of religion. In this encyclopaedia, the entries have been represented in a clear and explanatory style to provide both straight forward definitions and invaluable background information. This encyclopaedia includes material from various Indian and foreign sources which has been compiled and edited by the author to make the set interesting.

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H

Halahala (*lord of poison*)

God of poison. Buddhist (Mahayana). A form of Avalokitesvara. Typically seated on a red lotus with the *Sakti* on the left knee. Colour: white. Attributers: arrow, bow, cup, grass, image of Amitabha on crown, lotus, tiger skin and trident. Three-headed and three-eyed.

Hammu Mata

Mother goddess. Hindu. Locally worshipped by the Bhils.

Hansa (*goose*)

Minor *avatara* of Visnu. Hindu (Puranic). Depicted in the form of a goose.

Hanuman (*with large jaws*)

Monkey god. Hindu (epic and Puranic). Hanuman attends Rama, one of the incarnations of Visnu and personifies the ideal and faithful servant. He is the son of Pavana, the god of winds, and is noted for his speed and agility in which context he is often worshipped by young men and athletes. He leads a mythical forest army of monkeys, and is depicted as a monkey with a long tail. He takes a major role in the *Ramayana* epic searching for, and rescuing, the goddess Sita who has been captured by the demon Ravana. he may appear trampling on the goddess of Lanka [Sri Lanka]. worshipped particularly in southern India but more generally in villages. Colour: red. Attributes: bow, club, mane, rock and staff. May appear five-headed

Hanuman, the well-known monkey god, can be seen in temples throughout the country. In some temples his image is set up alone standing with a mace in the right hand or sitting ina a devotional posture before the images of Ram and Sita. He is considered to be the god of power and strength, who remained a celebate through his whole life. He is worshipped as being the greatest devotee of Ram, who loves Hanumana the most.

Hanuman's other names are Hanumat and Pavan-Sut. He is the son of Vayu the lord of winds and Anjana, the female seduced by Vayu. Along with Ram, Hanuman is invariably worshipped and he is the most favoured deity of wrestlers and grapplers. Tuesday is the sacred day on which lacs of Hindus worship Hanuman and pray to him for strength and prosperity.

Hanuman's deeds of bravery and feats of valour are related in great detail in the Ramayan and also scanitly in a few other religious books like Mahabharat and Agni Puran. This god is described as having a short thick neck, around red face, sharp white fangs, a mane like *Ashoka* flowers, a tail like Indra's banner and ability to expand until he could be as large as a mountain or to contract until he could be as small as a fly.

So many interesting myths surround this god. Hanuman, when quite young, saw the rising sun; he thought it to be a ripe fruit, jumped up to it and seizing it put the sun into his mouth. All the gods and goddesses, for fear that if swallowed the sun the whole world would perish, prayed to him to spit out the sun. Hanuman agreed and the would was saved from complete darkness. When only ten years old, Hanuman could lift the hills sixteen or twenty miles in circumference and throw these like stones. Once swallowed by a monster, he expanded his body and the monster had to vomit this god out.

On another occasion when one monster put Hanuman in his mouth, this god transformed himself into a very small figure and emerged out of this monster's big ear. This story runs thus: When Hanuman was on his flight to Ravan's Lanka on his job assigned by Ram, a female-demon named Surasa saw that this monkey was going to harm her near relative, Ravan. So in an effort to save her cousin she

swallowed Hanuman bodily. To avoid this Hanuman continued expanding his body, while she continued stretching her mouth till it was a hundred leagues wide. Suddenly Hanuman shrank his body and within seconds he became thumb-sized. Taking the female-demon by surprise he darted forward and came out through her right ear.

The scriptures state that 'his form is as vast as a mountain' and as tall as a gigantic tower. His complexion is yellow and glowing like molten gold. His face is as red as the brightest ruby; while his enormous tail spreads out to an interminable length. He stands on a lofty rock and roars like thunder. He leaps into the air and flies among the clouds with a rushing noise, while the ocean waves are roaring and splashing below. Ramayan further says, "The chief of monkeys is a perfect being. No one can equal him in learning of *Shastras* and in comprehending the meaning and sense of scriptures. In all sciences and in the rules of austerity, he rivals the preceptor of the gods. Hanuman is the ninth author of grammar."

Hanuman became the greatest and the most faithful helper of Ram in his campaing against Ravan. When sent as Ram's envoy Hanuman was given a ring to convince Sita that he was truly her husband's messenger. With a formidable leap he crossed the seas and reached Lanka. He succeeded in meeting Sita and brought her news back to Ram.

Ravan's guards, while hewas in Lanka, had succeeded in catching Hanuman, who was then brought to the demonking's court. At Ravan's command his tail was set on fire and with his burning tail Hanuman created a great havoc in Lanka. When Ram's younger brother was lying unconsicious in the battlefield and the herb that could cure him was not available, he came forward to bring that herb from Himalayas. In the hurry when Hanuman could not trace that magical herb, he lifted the complete hill and flew to bring the same to battlefield. The arrow that had wounded Lakshman was blessed in the way that whoever was wounded in the night with it could not recover if the cure wasnot obtained before day-light. Hanuman knew this and was determined to bring it before the sun rose. The powerful Ravan compelled the sun to arise on the

mountain at midnight. Hanuman, being enraged atthis conspiracy, leaped up and seizing sun's chariot placed the blazing god under his arm and put the mountain on his head. Only after the application of the desired herb on the wound of Lakshman, Hanuman permitted the sun to depart.

Hanuman accompained Ram on his return to Ayodhya and there he was given by Ram the blessings of perpetual mouth and deathless existence. He was was so much devoted to Ram and Sita that once he even tore up his chest with claws and showed that images of Ram and his wife were very much a his heart.

He is one of the most popular deities amongst Hindus and his pictures can be seen in almost every Hindu home.

Hardaul

Plague god. Hindu. A locally worshipped deity known particularly in Bundelkhand, northern India, as a protector against cholera and considered to have been an historical figure who died in 1627 AD. Also a wedding god.

Harsa (*desire*)

Goddess. Hindu. The Sakti of the god Hrsikesa.

Hasta (*hand*)

Minor goddess of fortune. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A benevolent naksatra or astral goddess daughter of Daksa and wife of Candra (Soma).

Hare Krishnas

From the age of Brahmanas, Hindus believed that creation came from the word *Aum* and the Godhead is Trinity, with the Mother Goddess apart from Trinity. The Trimity is Lord Brahma (Lord of Creation), Lord Vishnu (Lord of Preservation) and Lord Siva (Lord of Annihilation). The Mother Goddess is known as Sakti. Three main groups arose in Hinduism, namely Vaishnavites (those who worship Vishnu), Saivites (those who wordhip Siva), Saktites (those who worship the Mother Goddess). Three scriptures associated with those groups were developed namely, Vaishanava

Agamas, Saiva Agamas, and Sakta Agamas. The Sakta Agamas are also known as Tantras.

Some historians state that the Vaishnava movement degenerated in time due to constant battles with Saivites as well as due to the *Deva Dasi System*, where women from good families were used as temple prostitutes under the guise of serving Lord Vishnu and practising Tantras. The emergence of Buddhism as the prime religion among people due to Emperor Ashoka also contributed to the downfall of Vaishnavism. In recent years a great saint from India, Swami A.C Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada revived the ancient Vaishnava movement as "The International Society for Krishna Consciousness" or "Iskon". The popular name of the society is Hare Kirishnas, meaning "Victory to Lord Krishna".

First let me repeat to you the real name of that society—The International Society for Krishna Consciousness or in short Iskon. Hare Krishna Society is one of the most ascetic and ritualistic sects in the world. Sometimes one wonders how the Hare Krishna Society attracts devotees with its very strict moral and ethicl codes. There is absolutely no drinking, smoking and/or casual-sex activities allowed to members of the Society. The public chanting of the Mantra "Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare: Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare," is one of the important activities of the devotees. According to Srimad Bhagavata anyone who utters this Mantra and anyone who happens to listen to this Mantra are both blessed by God.

In addition to public chanting each devotee repeatsthe same Mantra 1,728 times every single day. The chanting is counted by a string of 108 Tulsi beads. So the string is counted through 16 times each day. Hare Krishna devotees do even menial jobs as offerings to Lord Krishna. They cleanse their bodiest at least twice a day and even among married people, sex is allowed only for progeny. Like any other society controversies still plague this society. Some people claim that their children were "brain-washed" by this pious society, but nobody can say exactly how much truth there is in those allegations. Hare Krishna devotees are pure vegetarians, and practise non-violence.

Hari (*yellowish brown*)

Minor incarnation of the god Visnu. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Popularized by modern religious movements. Hari is one of the sons of the god Dharma who sprang from the heart of Brahma. He is most closely linked with Krishna, but he and Krisna also parallel Dharma's other sons, Nara and Narayana. Hari can be a more generic epithet applied to several Hindu gods.

Hariti (*green or stealing*)

1. Mother goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of the group of *mataras* (mothers) who are the patrons of children. Considered by some to be identical with the goddess Vriddhi. Her consort is Pancika, alternatively Kubera. In her destructive aspect she steals and eats children. Particularly known from the north and north-west of India. Attribute: a child may be held at her hip, sometimes being eater.

Harsa (*desire*)

Goddess. Hindu. The Sakti of the god Hrsikesa.

Hatthi

Plague goddess. Hindu. Particularly associated with cholera in north-western India.

Hayasya

1. Horse god. Hindu. Probably identical with Hayagriva.

2. Horse goddess. Buddhist. Attribute: the head of a horse.

Hemantadevi

Goddess of winter. Buddhist-Lamaist (Tibet). One of several seasonal deities. Also an attendent of Sridevi. Usually acompanied by a camel. Colour: blue, Attributes: cup and hammer.

Hindu Dances

Hindu dances originated from the Lord Siva's (The God of Annihilation) famous dance namely Tandava Nrithyam. There are many versions of Tandava Nrithyam. The first one is the most

horrendous dance of Lord Siva with his crew after the annihilation of his father-in-law Daksha. Another one is a Dance of Death in which Siva is accompanied by Bharaiva, a skeleton attendant. A third from is popularly known as Nadanta, in which the dancer as a toothless old man desperately dances the vigorous dance of Lord Siva. The last one is the dance of Siva mounting Nandi and the dance results in the creation on earth.

The first rules of the Hindu Dances were codified by sage Bharata (not the great King Bharata) between 100 and 300 A.D.His treatise on drama, dance and music was known as Natyashastra. It is said that he is the first to compose the fiest sylables of Bhava (emotion), Raga (melody), Tala (rhythm) and (mood). Of course, just like any other Hindu scripture, we have no conclusive proof to show that sage Bharata wrote Natyashatra. It might have been the work of hundreds of saints. Anyway in some aspects Natyashatra resembles Aristotle's Poetics.

Hindu Dance is closely linked with emotions. It is a perfect harmony between classical music and bodily movement. In fact its objective can be summed up to create different moods in the minds of the spectators. Almost all Hindu dances are performed barefoot. Sometimes, in North India the dancers wear tiny slippers. Believe it or not, only by Devadasis (God's-serants) and unluckily Devadasis were more or less temple-prostitutes and as such the dancer's profession was looked down upon by the society. But today, all dancers are treated with respect and admiration throughout India and almost every girl try to learn dancing in India and abroad. Dance is basically composed of *Abhinaya*—facial and body expressions, Mudras —hand gestures, and Gati—all forms of foot work.

There are Four prominent Hindu dances and they are as follows:

Bharata Natyam of Tanjore

Kathak of Uttar Pradesh

Kathakali of Kerala and

Manipuri of Assam

Of course, there are still a large number of dances like Mohiniyattam of Kerala, Kunchipudi of Andhra, Chhau of Orissa. India is full of folk dances, and even though you may not see an ordinary Indian dancing in his day to-to-day life, the tradition of dancing is the part and parcel of the Hindu culture.

Bharata Nayam:

This is actually a temple dance originated in the temples and performed by Devadasis (God's slaves). It originated in South India and greatly patronized by the Chola Kings. Legends say that during his exile as a transvestite, Arjuna, the celebrated warrior of Mahabharata, taught this to women in the harem of King Virata. Bharata Natyam is a solo dance and its classical posses have been sculptured on the walls of the temple at Chidambaram.

As far as we know, there are 6 types of Bharata Natyam dances. They are:

1. *Alaripu*: An introductory and shortest form of Bharata Natyam lasting about 5 minutes.

2. *Jathi-Svaram*: More advanced form of dance. A very rhythmic form of footwork and body movements associated with different patterns of music.

3. *Varanam*: This is the dance which can make the spectator spellbound by its furious tempo. This is very elaborate and complex. Lasts about one hour.

4. *Sadanam*: A dance associated with a poem.

5. *Padam*: Another dance associated with a poem.

6. *Tillana*: This dance is closely associated with Carnatic music and most people like Tillana as the best form of Bharata Natyam.

Kathak:

This is dance in a story form. This dance is very popular in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. It is based on mythological stories about Lord Krishna and his favorite consort Radha. Like Bharata Natyam, this dance also performes Devadasis in temples of North India. Just like Bharata Natyam, this dance also is a proper combination of

Abhinayam. Mudra and Gati.

Kathakali:

This dance actually originated in Malabar, Kerala. This dance is more or less in a dance-drama form, narrating the mythological stories in dance format. Almost all dancers are men and they are masked to depict the mythological characters they are representing. This dance lasts for 10 to 12 hours. Usually starting at 7 p.m. and ending at 7 am, it is an all-night show.

Manipuri:

This dance is usually performed by the hill people residing in Manipur, State of Assam. Both men and women take part in this dance accompanied by chorus singers. The costumes of dancers are very colourful with girls wearing long wide skirts. Just like Kathak dance, Manipuri dance theme is centered on Lord Krishna and his girl-friends, namely Gopis.

Lord Nataraja—then King of Dance symbolizes the Rhythm of the universe—the perpetual cycle of creation and annihilation. In his very famous book, The Tao of Physics, Fritjof Capra, explains Dance as the most basic and relevant of all forms of expression and uses such phrases as The dance of Creation and Destruction and Energy Dance. So in a nutshell the Hindu Dances represents the Vibration (Spandhanam) in every being and every atom in this universe.

Hindu Diet Code

According to Hinduism, food is divided into three categories-- Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic. Tamasic is the worst food of all. The food that is left over and contaminated is usually called Tamasisc food. These foods are supposed to produce jealousy and greed among men.

Rajasic foods: Food that consists of meat of animals is called Fajasic food. Rajasic food also contains spices, onions, garlic, hot-pepper, pickles etc. Rajasic foods are supposed to produce activity and strong emotional qualities among men.

Sattvic foods: Sattvic foods are those foods which do not agitate

your stomach al all. Much of the Sattvic food consists of fruits and nuts, and vegetables. These foods are supposed to produce calmness and nobility among men. Hindu diet codes strictly prohibit the consumption of beef and pork. As per those codes, eating fruits and vegetables increases on's magneticism. From what we can understand today about diets, we are sure that ancient Hindu saints had a very good idea about food in general and their effect on the body and thinking pattern of man. Expression of the soul is dependent on the body, and the body is dependent on food. So for proper spiritual development, a proper diet is a must for everyone.

Hindu Epics

The Ramayana and its sister epic, the Mahabharata constitute a veritable treasure—trove of Indian lore, learning, legends and mythology, both religious and secular. These two great ornate poems, the creation of the heroic age, constitute the national epics of the Hindus. For the last many centuries, these two epies have exercised a profound influence on India's moral and religious living and thinking, and also on all types of creative expressions. Puranic in nature, these two great works have been quite popular among the masses. They have percolated through all the strata of Hindu society in the forms of literature, songs, sculpture, painting and classical and folk performing arts. The Vedas and the Upanishads written in Sanskrit were meant for the pandits and scholars, but the epics have been accessible to all and sundry in the form of translations in various vernacular languages of the country. For example, in Hindi alone, which is spoken by the majority of the Indians, there are over 350 versions of the Ramayana. The universal diffusion of the epics in India, nay the whole of the South-east Asia, has been quite wonderful. Their great popularity has been a living monument to the Hindu ideal of ultimate victory of good over evil. They both delineate the eternal principles of dharma and righteous living and triumph over the forces of evil.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the two encyclopaedias of the ancient Aryan life and wisdom portraying an ideal civilization, which humanity has

yet to aspire after". According to Sister Nivedita, "For, it would scarcely be going too far to say that no one unfamiliar with the story of Rama and Sita can be in any real sense a citizen of India, nor acquainted with morality as the greatest of Indian teachers conceived it. Perhaps one might go further and say that no one unfamilar with the story of Rama and Sita can be a true citizen of the world."

Juxtaposing the two epics, Shri P. Lal has very ably observed : "The Ramayana rouses scompassion, the Mahabharata almost cosmic awe. The story of Rama and Sita recommends ideal human love, the story of the Pandavas and the Kauravas is a doom narrative. Valmiki rules the Hindus heart, Vyasa goes into his very guts. Valmiki shows the dhammapada, the sweet and straight path of dharma... But Vyasa posits an intricate dharma, where right and wrong are bewilderingly mixed... Valmiki delineates the Hindu, the Indian dream of perfection; uyasa pricks the Hindu, the Indian conscience. Valmiki's epic is a vision; Vyasa's epic a mirror...Vyasa is ubiquitious and inescapable, he will not let us be, he is like an eczema itch, a chronic toothache, a betrayed love.

"The anguished intensity of the Indian involvement with the Mahabharata can be seen in the way reference is made to the epic in public life. The Ramayana is cited generally when ethical ideas are expected, the Mahabharata is referred to when compromises are made, shady deals struck, promises dishonoured, battles fought, disaster lamented."

The Vedas and the Upanishads belonged to the learned, but the epics and the Puranas formed the religious public property. For a long time they were transmitted orally from one generation to another in some particular families of the bards, singers and wandering ministrels. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata can be called the culmination of a long tradition of epic poetry, which existed in the Puranic times. By this time many Vedic gods were pushed into background and many others became the part of oblivion, and then Vishnu and Shiva became prominent instead. In the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, it is the heroes Rama and Krishna, the two incarnations of Vishnu, whose exploits and

adventures have been elaborately sung and celebrated. It is the epics and the Puranas which inspire and shape the modern popular Hindu thoughts and practice far more than the Vedas and the Upanishads.

The Ramayana is a homogeneous poem and presents much higher idealistic view, and exercises more wide popular appeal than the Mahabharata. The Ramyayana, consisting of seven books and 2,400 shlokas or stanzas, is far shorter in size than the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata, about eight times the size of Iliad and Odyssey put together, the largest of the epics in the world, contains 10,000 verses. The Mahabharata is a whole literature attributed to the pen of rishi Krishna [Dvaipayana Vyasa. It is the epics together with the Puranas, which constitute the most mighty single factor that has held together and sustained the Hindus all these centuries full of ups and downs, and foreign racial and political invasions. Their abiding and deep indluence on Indian morals, art, culture and the vast gamut of social life is now a well established fact. In the opinion of a scholar the epics "have affected so large a population over so long a period of time and soulded the character and civilization of so vast a region, often transcending geographical limits, can ill afford to be termed mere epics.' Indeed the Ramayana and the Mahabharata should better be regarded as true history of India, history not of events, but of urges and aspirations, strivings and purposes of the nation. Encyclopaedic in nature, together they form 'the content of our collective unconscious' wherein breathe 'the united soul of India and the individual soul of her people.' "

Hindu Fasts and Festivals

The Hindu festivals, fasts, rituals, holy baths and the observance of sacred days are part and parcel of great cultural heritage of India. They are deeply religious and social and a great source of spiritual and moral enrichment. They also lend zest, variety, colour and grandeur to an otherwise insipid, routine and care-worn day to-day human existence. The Hindu festivals are more than what they appear to be they are essentially a way of living and thinking in the course of existence, and as such bring their whole weight to bear on

the individual and the society.

Not unlike the deities of the Hindu pantheon, they are numerous and frequent, but basically religious, psychological and intimately connected with the coming of the seasons, though many of them have lost the history of their origin in the mists of hoary past. With the passage of time they have undergone a process of transformation and evolution and many new festivals have been grafted upon the old ones.

A Hindu estival is generally characterized by fasting, ablutions, prayer, worship, austerities, vigils, vows, offerings to the gods and holy persons and such other activities of piety and devotion. It may be again repeated and underlined that a Hindu festival is more than a 'festival'. It is cathartic is nature, and as a means of purification strengthens the spirit within. They are an object lesson in finding enjoyment through renunciation and self-denial. They are an exploration in the enjoyment of things without being bound and obsessed by them.

Reality is one, but it has many forms and names in relation to its multifarious functions, attributes, aspects and the form of fulfilment sought from it by the seeker. The same Reality becomes Brahma in its creative aspect, Vishnu in preservation, Shiva in dissolution, Lakshmi or Sri in benignity, Kali or Durga as a fierce female energy and so on. Has not Lord Krishna in Gita said:

"I am the ritual, I am the sacrifice, the oblation, and the herb. I am the prayer and the melted butter, the fire and its offering."

"Even those who are devotees of other gods if they worship with faith, are sacrificing to me alone, though not adhering to the rule."

There are different ways to fulfilment of salvation and spiritual evolution. The Upnishadas advocate the path of knowledge and wisdom. Bhakti or devotion is another, and far more easy, smooth and open to the masses. In bhakti the worldly life is not an obstacle. Bhakti is based on, and inspired by both love and reverence towards the object of devotion or God. A devotee craves for the divine grace and indulges in worship, prayer, chanting of his names, praising his glory, fasting, and such other ritual observances

to achieve it. A bhakta lives passionately all his conceivable relation with the godhead, the immanent reality alone. For him He is father, mother, brother, friend, beloved, wife, family, refuge, teacher, master, kinsmen and what not.

The fast as a religious vow, observance and practice, comprising obstinence from all sensual gratification, is an austerity or tapas. The spiritual powers developed through devotion and tapas are all too well-known. The Puranas tell us how alarmed by the penances of the yogis and rishis, Indra would send beautiful nymphs, par excellence, to inspire in them passions and disturb their devotion. It is through tapas, penance and contemplation that Brahma created the world, Indra achieved the lorship of the heaven, Parvati got Shiva as her consort, Shiva became the lord of all animate and inanimate objects, and Vishnu the preserver of all things. A fast as a religious observance is the best form of austerity for the masses and the householders.

Fasting helps in concentratrion, contemplation, overcoming the passions, controlling the senes and in overhauling our various body systems. Fasting as a means of spiritual development, purification and self-discipline has been a time honoured religious practice since times immemorial. It cleanses the various human organs and rejuvenates the body by liminating toxins. It provides rest and relaxation to the digestive system and opens the new avenues of growth by realising the spiritual energy. The women folk in India are relatively fewer than men, but they live and last longer, and one of its secrets is that they are more religious, devout and resort to fasts frequently. A fast, when coupled with piety and devotion, becomes a tremendous force leading to a marked physical, mental and spiritual development. In these days of strain and stress, the importance of fasting accompanied by prayer, worship, contemplation and such other acts of piety and devotion can hardly be overemphsized. Thus, a fast can become a definite milestone on the path of perfection if undertaken in right spirit.

Fasting starves the disease and deficiency and nourishes the aspirant. It is not starving but a sure way to remain alert, trim and slim. Occasional abstinence from food helps a lot in overcoming

overweight and obesity. It is a sure way of rest, repair and getting rid of accumulated wastes. Animals in the wild, and even in c aptivity, stop eating when not well or hurt. A lot of energy is spent in digesting food. By abstaining from food we can conserve and release this energy for higher, spiritual attainments and self-healing. Observe fast and remain physically, mentally and spiritually alert and beautiful A weekly fast is sure to refresh, strengthen and improve your health and metabolism.

In this regard once Leo Tolstoy beautifully remarked, "To eat when one is hungry, drink water when one is thirsty these are great plasures of the body, but to refuse food and drink and everything the body desires is more than a pleasure, it is the joy of the soul". Fasting is neither starvation, nor affectation, nor an outward observance; nor it is to be confused with dieting. The purpose of fasting is far higher and nobler, and the results highly rewarding. Fasting is na religious way of living and thinking. Mahatma Gandhi was a great devout and religious man, and he has been an outstanding example of fasting in our times. He fasted many times and for long durations, but we should not try to emulate Gandhi in this respect and be modest and balanced.

The Hindu month is divided into two fortnights or Pakshas, and 30 lunar days or "tithis". These 30 lunar days are roughly equivalent to $29\frac{1}{2}$ solar days. The first fornight, i.e, the Shukla Paksha (Sudi) or the bright fortnight begins with the new moon. The dark fortnight or the Krishna Paksha (Badi) begins and ends with the full moon. The moon affords convenient punctuations for timing the Hindu religious observances and sacred days and tithis. According to Vishnu Purana Brahma, the Great Creator made the Moon, the monarch of all the planets, herbs, sacrifices and austerities. Each tithi or lunar day of the 15 phases of the moon has its special significance, and marks the appropriateness for a particular ceremony or observance.

As the 12 lunar months make only 354 solar days so there is an "adhid mass" or extra month after every 30 lunar months.

This leap month is generally either after Ashadha or Shravana, and is known as second (dvitiya) Ashadha or Shravana. The Hindu new

year begins with Chaitra (March-April). The 12 months of the Hindu calendar are as under:

1. Chaitra	March-April
2. Vaisakha	April-May
3. Jyaishtha	May-June
4. Ashadha	June-July
5. Shravana	Jaly-August
6. Bhadrapada	August-September
7. Ashvina	September-October
8. Kartika	October-November
9. Margsirsa/ Agrahayana	November-December
10. Pausa	December-January
11. Magha	January-February
12. Phalgun	February-March

The 15 days of both the bright and dark fortnights of each month are called:

Pratipada	the first day of a lunar fortnight
Dvitiya	the second day of a lunar fortnight
Tritiya	the third day of a lunar fortnight
Chaturthi	the fourth day of lunar fortnight
Panchami	the fifth day of a lunar fornight
Shashti	the sixth day of a lunar fortnight
Saptami	the seventh day of a lunar fortnight
Ashtmi	the eighth day of a lunar fortnight
Navami	the ninth day of a lunar fortnight

Dashami	the tenth day of a lunar fortnight
Ekadashi	the eleventh day of a lunar fortnight
Dvadashi	the Twelfth day of a lunar fortnight
Trayodashi	the thirteenth day a lunar fortnight
Chaturdashi	the fourteenth day a lunar fortnight
Purnima	the fifeenth day of the dark fortnight

According to the Hindu almanac there are six Ritus or Seasons. A group of two months mark a Season. The six Seasons are :

1. Vasanta : Spring : March-May
2. Grishma : Summer : May-July
3. Varsha : Rains : July-September
4. Sharad : Autumn : September-November
5. Hemanta : Winter : November-January
6. Sishira : Cool Season : January-March

The Aryans were the great practisers of penances and at the same time no less pleasure-seekers. They achieved a golden mean between the seemingly two opposites and extremes, and this ideal can be seen enshrined in the Gita:

"Yoga is not possible for him who eats too much or for him who abstains too much from eating; it is not for him, O Arjuna, who sleeps too much or too little.

"For him who is moderate in eating and recreation, temperate in his actions, who is regulated in sleep and wakefulness, yoga becomes the destroyer of pain".

The Aryans performed sacrifices, took sacred baths, and observed fasts with a view to achieving spiritual purification and strength They turned every possible opportunity into observance of fasts, rituals, worship and at their termination enjoyed grand feasts and festivities. The Vedic literature is full of references to dance and musical recitals, chariot races, and also gambling as a means of

recreation. On festivals, they performed sacrifices, did prayers to the various deities, drank Somrasa and enjoyed to their hearts content.

In the epic days of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata this tradition of fasting and festivals continued with a new fervour and devotion. For example, in the Ramayana we find Ayodhdya being decorated like a bride at the time of Rama's Coronation, which was not to be. All the highways were swept, watered and scented, garlands hung on every gate and flags streamed. The citizens feasted their eyes and ears on festive dancing and songs and the people reared up lamp posts in the shape of trees and Ayodhya resembling like a heavenly city, became loud with the cheers and the noise of the outsiders that begin to pour in the city. In the meanwhile Rama and Sita remained on fast and night vigil, sat on the grass on the bare floor, worshipped Narayana and offered oblation with clarified butter into sacrificial fire.

These festivals, fasts and ceremonial observations did not began all of a sudden. They all are rooted in certain traditions and ideals which have left deep impressions on our culture and civilization. Their observance by the masses throughout the length and the breadth of the country and even in some foreign lands, mark our cultural affinity, emotional integration common ethos, points of contacts and bonds of unity in diversity.

Hindu Pantheon is believed to consist of 33 crore (330 million) Devi-devatas. They included both local and universal gods and gooddesses. Every city, place and village in India has its own presiding and patron deity, who shares the joys and sorrows of his devotees. Each day, each season in India has a host of festivals to offer, each with a difference and speciality of its own. On these days generally work is suspended, and fasts are observed, feasts organised, the houses decorated, the best clothes and jewels are worn and austerities and other acts of piety and devotion are done. It is well nigh impossible here to enumerate all of these, but there are certain festivals, fasts, and rituals which stand out prominently.

Hindu Holy Festivals

There are many Hindu festivals and their importance differs from place to place. Holi is a religious festival of North India, and it is not celebrated in South India. To give you another example, *Onam* (flower festival) is a very important religious festival in the State of Karala, but the rest of India does not celebrate it.. Similarly the hody festival Pongal is strictly restricted to Tamil Nadu.

Deepavali Festival: Deepavali or the festival of lights is an important Hindu festival celebrated during the month of Kartika (October-November). Deepa means "light' and Avali means 'row'. In brief Deepavali means a row of lights. Deepavali is the celebration of the triumphant return of Lord Rama and his consort Sita to the kingdom of Ayodhya, after the annihilation of Ravana (King of Ceylon or Sri Lanka). During this celebration, people light rows of small candles or oil lamps along balconies and windows to welcome Lord Rama and Sita home. Deepavali is also considered a festival to worship Goddess of Wealth. A special Goddess Lakshmi pooja is performed in most Hindu homes during this festival. During Deepavali people visit friends and exchange sweets and gifts.

Dassera Festival: Dassera is another nine-day festival which is celebrated in many parts of India, specially in Mysore in the State of Karnataka. Dassera is the celebration of the victory of Goddess Durga (Kali) over the demon in the form of a buffalo by name Mahishasura. This festival is also called Navaratri meaning "nine nights". It is said that Goddess Durga took nine days and nights to annihilate the demon. In northern parts of India, Dassera is a celebration of the victory of Lord Rama over demon- king Ravana, King of Sri Lanka. During Dassera special poojas are conducted in Hindu temples as well as in Hindu homes. Dassera festival lasts for a week.

Holi festival: This festival also has a mythological background. It is said that once the world was ruled by a demon-king, Hiranyakashipu. He proclaimed himself as God and made everyone pray to him but his son, Prahlada, persisted in worshipping Lord Vishnu. As per the order of Hiranyakashipu, a female demon

named Holika who herself was believed to be immune to the ravages of fire carried Prahlada into fire. It is said that due to the blessings of Lord Vishnu, Prahlada came out untouched by the fire, whereas Holika was burnt to ashes. The Holi festival celebrates this mythological event. Some say that this festival is in honor of Kama Deva, the god of sexual desire. Whatever the legends say, the Holi festival is one of the most important festivals of North India. Holi festival is celebrated during February-March. A bonfire is also lit on the eve of Holi. During the day following Holi, people throw coloured water and bright herbal powders at one another. Just as in Deepavali festival, during this festival also, people exchange gifts and sweets.

Onam Festival: This festival is celebrated in the State of Kerala only to mark the end of summer monsoon. This festival also has a mythological origin. It is said that once the world was ruled by a demon-king named Mahabali who made the world better than heaven. That was against the rule since the world was not supposed to be better than heaven and the god of heaven, Indra, was much annoyed. So to keep matters straight Lord Vishnu came down as Vamana (dwarf) and begged King Mahabali for land which would cover his three small steps. Without any thought, King Mahabali agreed. Then Vamana suddenly grew to unimaginable proportions and stepped over both heaven and earth by two giant steps. It is said that then King Mahabali lowered his head in front of Vamana to put his third step. Vamana then pushed King Mahabali down to the world underneath known as Patala. Just before King Mahabali was pushed out of this earth, he was given Mahabali was pushed out of this earth, he was given permission by Vamana to visit his people once every year. The *Onam* festival is a celebration of welcoming Mahabali to his lost kingdom. During this festival, beautiful floral decorations are made in every house and boat races are held throughout Kerala. A twenty-one- course feast is the more important part of the Onam festival.

Pongal Festival: This is an important festival held during January-February in the State of Tamil Nadu. It is a three-day festival celebrated at the time of the rice-harvest.

There are still more religious festivals in India. *Sivaratri* (February-March) is a festival honoring Lord Siva. It is celebrated throughout India. Janmashtami (August-September) is in celebration of the birthday of Lord Krishna. Ganesh Chaturthi (August-September) is a festival honoring Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed son of Lord Siva. This festival is observed with great zeal in cities like Bombay where images of Lord Ganesha are carried in special processions. Vasant Panchami (January-February) is a spring festival honoring Goddess Saraswati, the consort of Lord Brahma and Goddess of Knowledge.

Hinduism

We follow Hinduism, so we are called. Hindus, like the people who follow Christianity are called Christians. There is only one God and one truth. So a Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim and a Jew are all one and the same. Anyway, Hinduism is not a religion, but a way of Life. Looking at it in another way, Hinduism is the relentless pursuit after truth. As such, it is the religion forever. For argument's sake, one can state that, if all Hindu scriptures are destroyed one day, this age-old religion will come back to life again within few years, since it pursues only ABSOLUTE TRUTH.

Hinduism has no problem facing any type of questions. It does not have to hide behind unpronounceable Sanskrit words or spiritual dogmas. Instead, it absorbs new ideas like a sponge. Believe it or not, Hinduism recharges itself with modern technolgy. Psychology, parapsychology, modern astronomy, the new physics and genetics enrich Hinduism.

In Hinduism, you can think and argue on any subject. You can even make statements like, THERE IS NO KRISHNA OR RAMA and still be a Hindu. It has no hierarchy, it has no establishment and it has no governing body.

In Hinduism, one will seldom come across a statement starting with THOU SHALT NOT. As you study Hinduism, from one end to the other end, you will find it to be filled with all kind of ideas. It has highly spiritualistic *Advaita and Raja Yoga* on one side and highly materialistic, atheistic, hedonistic *Charvaka philosophy,* which

does not believe in God and Vedas on other side.

On one side, Idolatry is a part of Hinduism and still on another side, as per the words of German philosopher-thinker Max Muller:: "The religion of Vedas knows no idols." The Jahala Upanishad says: "Images are meant only as as aids to medittion for the ignorant."

The ancient Hindu mythology is filled with all kinds of stories. One one side. *Advaita* talks about *Brahman* (the Infinite) alone and still on other side mythology talks about thousands of Gods. It is indeed a religion with unity in diversity. Picking up subjects randomly from Hindu scriptures, could confuse you. But if you sit down and study them all, you will be able to understand the actual truth behind all Hindu scriptures. Today there is a quite large number of books on Hinduism available in English and in so many other languages and so even the knowledge of Sanskrit is not a Must to understand Hindu scriptures.

Arjuna asked the questions to Lord Krishna, during the narration of the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu Holy Bible. Lord Krishna as an answer to Arjuna showed him his Viswaroopa—the great formless form or shapelessoshape and a stunned Arjuna saw the whole world revolving on the body of God. Arjuna got more than he had bargained for. Well, I cannot show you any such thing. You may laugh, but since even Arjuna asked that question to Lord Krishna, it is perfectly all right for you to ask me the same question. On my part I can only say that I am a humble aspirant of truth like so many people. Of course I have read quite a large number of books to the tune of 500 regarding Hinduism and all other religions. My only intention is to lay out before you, the history of Hinduism as well as the very salient points about Hinduism. After listening to my answers, you on your part should investigate the validity of my statements. At this juncture, let me repeat one of the stanzas from a scripture, which a Guru told his disciple:

Nobody knows what is right or what is wrong; Nobody knows what is good or what is bad; There is a deity residing within you; Find it out and obey its commands.

That is my answer. Please understand the deity mentioned in the stanza is none other than the Inner Voice about which Aurobindo, the modern Hindu mysitc wrote volumes. It is indeed the Christ within or to put it in better words it is the immortal Holy Ghost. I just wanted to point out to you that all final answers are within. Like a Zen Master, I want to tell you that to seek answers without oneself is futile and idiotic. Zen Buddhists say that Truth cannot be toaught by the word of mouth and true knowledge only comes from personal experience.

Again please do not misunderstand the above stanza as a green light for licentiousness and do things as one's emotions dictate. Emotions within a man are very deceptive. They can come out with intellectual authority and make every silly action look meaningful... They even dupe great saints and seers in believing in their own personal egoistic sentiments and to act very foolishly. So be very cautious of the above verses I quoted from a scripture.

Once a gentleman told the famous American philosopher Emerson, that he (gentleman) had studied almost all philosophies and religions of the world, and he was finally convinced that Christianity was the only one; to which Emerson replied: That only shows, my friend, how narrowly you have read them. The same statement goes for Hinduism too. Nobody has the right to say that Hinduism is the only one. In fact Hindus consider it absurd to state that any other true religion of the world is false.

The Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 4-11) says:

Whatever and whichever way men approach me, Even so do accept them;

Whatever paths (religions) they may choose,

Finally lead to Me Oh! Arjuna (His disciple).

From the above lines, one can easily understand that Hinduism does not project itself as the only way to God-realization. It claims no monopoly to wisdom. It tolerates all forms of thoughts. A Hindu yogi will never try to convert a person from another religion to Hinduism. Instead he will try to make a person's faith steadfast in

his/her own religion. The Gita says: In whatever form a devotee seeks to worship me with faith, I make his faith steadfast in that form alone. So as per Hinduism, you can worship Almighty, which is formless and timeless, as Krishna, Jesus, Allah, Moses, Any-one or Anything...As long as you have faith in that form of the Almighty, you will be following a true religion and you will ultimately realize THE TRUTH, even if you are following a crude form of worship.

In India, saints often say that it you visualize it and call forth intensely as a 'water buffalo', then 'IT' will appear in front of you as a water buffalo. In fact, legends say that God appeared in front of American-Indians, as a Buffalo.

When someone calls IT as Jesus Christ, IT comes as Jesus Christ; when someone call IT as Lord Krishna, IT comes as Lord Krishna. Even the most popular devotee of the world, sage Narada calls God by word *Asmin* meaning That in the 2nd Sutra of Narada Bhakti Sutra. Sufis said: Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of Allah.

In all worships, ultimately worshippers will transcend the Name and form of their personal God. Look at the writings of St. Francis of Assissi or Sufi mystics or Lord Chaitanya or Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Lord Chaitanya cried for Vithal and Ramarkrishna cried for Mother Kali. But if one studies all the works of both of them, one can see that the ABSOLUTE they were after has no name and form and it is beyond human description. All of them started with their attachment to a personal God and finally ended up with An *Almighty* which is *Timeless* and *Formless.*

The word Islam, means submitter to the will of Allah and Allah has no proper definition. A true Moslem worships that formless, nameless entity called Allah, which is indeed the *Supreme Power.* Moslems object to the term *Mohammedanism* because that word imply worship of Mohammad. All Moslems believe in the following cardinal statement: I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and Mohammad is his prophet. Allah indeed like the Tao is un- namable, un-definable pure being, out of which all emerges.

A true Hindu never proselytizes. The Bhagavad Gita urges

everyone to follow the religion in which he/she was born. Just like Hindus, Jews are also very tolerant of believers of other faiths. Jews do not persuade others to join their religion. Of course, there are many converts to Judaism, but Jews never actively propagate their faith. To some extent, just like Hinduism, Judaism also is a way of life. Again Hindus look at religion as a basic science. Have you ever heard of somebody being converted into Indian Chemistry, or British Physics. So it is absurd even to discuss about conversions. There is only one truth. All of us have equal right to that truth, like all of us have equal right to Raman's Effect (Indian), Einstein's Quantum Theory (German Jew) or Edison's Experiments (American). So The Bhagavad Gita, The Holy Bible, The Koran, The Tora, The Dharmapada etc. are open to all. All of us have equal right to quote Christ and Krishna and Lao-Tse and Socrates and Mohammad in the same sentence. Just like all sciencess are open to all, all religions are open to all.

In Hinduism, tolerance is not simply a matter of policy but an article of faith. Historians like. H. G. Wells say that Hindu kings actually welcomed with open arms christian missionaries and Muslim Fakirs and Buddhist monks for free exchange of ideas. One great Hindu king. Ashoka, in fact changed his religion to Buddhism and propagated Buddhism throughout India. One of the great apostles of Jesus Christ, St. Thomas came all the way to Madras, India, and propagated Christiantiy and finally died at Mylapore, Madras. A true Hindu never condemns any True religion. He/She accepts the truth behind all religions. A Hindu saint will only be happy to read the Bible or the Koran to his devotees.

Swami Vivekananda said: I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both toberance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. As different streams having different sources all mingle their waters in the sea, so different paths which men take through tendencies, various thoughts they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to God.

Hinduism not only allows, but actually encourages one to seek truths from all sources. Within Hinduism, it strictly forbids

comparison of different methods of God-realization for their individual merits, since all methods are true and all of them lead devotees to God-realization. After studying Hinduism well, a Hindu should read and study all other true religions. Then he or she will be able to see Hinduism as the encyclopedia of religions, fully grasping the greatness of Jesus Christ, the sacrificial nature of Sufi saints and the importance of the ten commandments. If one knows Hinduism well, the Bible, Koran, Adi Grantha (the holy book of Sikhs) will be interesting to road.

One of the great Hindu Puranas, Srimad Bhagavatam says: Like a honey bee gathering trickles of honey from different flowers, the wise man accepts the essence of different scriptures and sees only the good in all religions. With that kind of ideology, a Hindu should be eager to read all religious books in the world.

In Hinduism there is no hierarchy. One of the ancient Hindu saints, Adi Sankara set up four monasteries in different corners of India, which are popularly known as Sankaramaths. They are at Sringeri (Mysore). Badrinath (Himalayas), Dwaraka (Gujarat) and Puri (Orissa). The chief priest of each monastery is called Sankaracharya and priests teach Hindus all aspects of Hinduism. Of course, these mon-asteries have no power to rule over the individual will of any Hindu. There are many monasteries in India, apart from the four I mentioned above, and all of them are independent of each other and all of them propagate Hindu ideals in their own individual way, without criticizing cach other.

Nobody is excommunicated from Hinduism...Nobody is persecuted in Hinduism... Hinduism had revolutionaries like Buddha (who refused to acknowledge the authority of Vedas) and Adi Sankara (who propagated Advaita philospphy)...but it never had any major division and never will be...for it is open to all type of criticisms from all quarters.

Hinduism started with *Sruti*, that which is heard. The Christlike masters of Vedic age called *Rishis* heard in their hearts eternal truths' and they taught their disciples telepathically, by actual transfer of thoughts. Later they came out with languages like Sanskrit and Pali. For long periods of time, there were no written

texts. The Vedas and Upanishads were taught in chanting lyrics.

We know that thought is the best medium of realizing true knowledge, but since we cannot transfer thoughts, we express them in languages. Verbal language is better than written language in expressing thoughts. Sanskrit, Pali, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew were used to express thoughts in ancient days. It is said that Jesus Christ talked in Armenian language and years after his crucifixion the *New Testament* was written in three languages namely Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The *New Testament* still preserve some important Aramaic statements such as Eli, *Lama Sabachthani* (My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me))—Mathew 27:46. During 15th century, the first English version of the Bible, as a translation from its originals from Greek and Hebrew was written by William Tyndale. Unfortunately, William Tyndale (1525) was accused of blasphemy and later executed and burned at the stake!

After Tyndale, seven more subsequent English versions of the Bible were written. The last of which is the most popular King. James version of Bible, meaning that this popular Bible was compiled by a large number of theologians under the leadership of King James of England in 1611. Unluckily, even the first edition of King James Version of the English Bible had about 300 errors in it. (Ref: How we got the Bible by Neil R. Lightffot). This only shows, how difficult is is to write thoughts in words, even a great scripture like Bible.

English right now is spoken by the vast majority of people and its vocabulary has developed abundantly and has become the prime means of conveying thoughts. So, English may be the only language in the world, which can express Truths in more understandable format. Luckily for us, we have Mathematics and Physics and other sciences to aid us to understand subtle truths today. Again understanding is something very personal. For example E=MC may be just a few letters for common folks, but for students of science, they speak volumes. So eternal truths can be understood only if we evolve high enough to understand the truth. This is true of Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and all other religions. Taoism states "Impressions of life cannot be conveyed by words."

The Chinese mystic Lao-Tse said:

He who knows never tells.

He who tells never knew...This shows subtle truths are indeed difficult to express in words since words try to limt the size of the subtle truth. It will be correct to conclude that human mind can never conceive the *ultimate truths of the universe.* Indeed Einstein tried to develop an unified field theory to explain all the riddles in the universe, but he failed miserably. Finally Einstein accepted defeat and said: The human mind is not capable of grasping the universe. We are like a little child, entering a huge library...Gauthama Buddha had very clearly stated that only by transcending human existence, one can understand the supreme reality. That may be the reason who BUDDHA as a young prince who left the country to get instant remedies *for old age and death,* came back with his famous 8-fold path to Nirvana. If there are ready-made answers to the riddles of the universe, great masters like Buddha and Christ would have surely given them to the world. Since their answers are ambiguous to almost all of us, we have to face the fact that ultimate truths are beyond mind and beyond duality perception.

Today, confined to his wheel-chair, unable to speak, paralysed by an incurable disease, the great British Physicist Stephen Hawking seeks the grand unification theory that will explain all the riddles of the universe...Will he succeed? Will he be able to unlock the mysteries of the universe? That is one billion-dollar question??? Issac Newton's universe was perfect and linear and predictable. Einstein's universe became somewhat unpredictable the universe is *somewhat chaotic* and unpredictable.

Look at one of the oldest Hindu scripture Manusmriti. You will see that Manu has restricted the freedom of women in so many ways. He also had put down the foundation-stone of the modern-day caste system. The Code of Manu indeed is the history of a nomad society, taking roots on the banks of the river Indus. Similarly look at Exodus in the Old Testament. It talks about slaves and how to treat them. Old Testament is the true history of Jews in those times.

So I fully agree with you, almost all scriptures in the world are part and parcel of History and Tradition.

Many may disagree with me, but I must say that metaphor is a part and part of all religious scriptures. The poet within the saint has taken off and wrote things in almost all religious scriptures in the world. One will come across lines similar to the Lotus Eaters of Tennyson, in many religious scriptures in one form or other.

So religious scriptures should be properly scanned to get proper meanings rather than studying them as true in every written word. We will make grave errors if we try to analyze the literal meanings of the scriptures.

The word Theism means 'belief in a god or gods.' So the word Atheism means 'absence of theistic belief or the belief that there is no god or gods of any kind.' So in a nutshell a person who does not believe in the existence of a God is an Atheist. Agnostic on other hand is a person who believes that there are things beyond human mind. An agnostic may or may not believe in a God. So an agnostic can be a theist or an atheist. The term Gnostic as well as Atheistic were actually coined by a philosopher- thinker Thomas Huxley in 1869. Gnostic came from the Greek root- word Gnosis meaning to know.

The best explanation of both terms came from the Catholic Encyclopedia and it is as follows:

"An agnostic is not an atheist. An atheist denies the existence of God; an agnostic professes ignorance about His existence. For the latter, God may exist, but reason can neither prove or disprove it."

I should say some intellectuals in the world are agnostic. But at the same time, most uneducated masses are just believers. Most religions in the world, uses 'the fear of God and hell' to make people believe in their religions. This you will never come across in Hinduism. A believer, an Atheist and an Agnostic can happily coexist in Hinduism. Let us look at the case of Bertrand Russell. West looked at him as an atheist. But actually he was an agnostic. He questioned everything and he never came to any conclusions. The only mistake he did was to write a book named Why I am not a

Christian. He should not have named the book in that format to hurt the feelings of millions of devoted Christians around the globe. He had no right to hurt the feelings of millions of Christians...He should have named instead. The doubts I have about world religions. That would have saved him from unnecessary citicisms from many religious quarters as well as denying himself a job in the New York City. Anyway, I don't think he has ever written that There is no God. For that will be against his style, denying or approving something which he has no idea of, nor he has any definition of. Russell did not deny God, since he could not define God. Standing in Hinduism, one can easily respect and admire people like Russell, Freud and Darwin. Hinduism has its share of atheists and agnostics. The Charvaka philosophy and to some extent Vaisesika philosophy question the existence of a personal God. Kanada, the founder of Vcisesika philosophy only mentioned God as That in all his writings.

All Hindu scriptures point out to the fact that agnosticism is the starting point of a relentless pursuit after truth. Just like a pinch of salt, which goes to find out the depth of the ocean, becomes part and parcel of the ocean, an agnostic will finally realize eternal truths, if he persists in his search of truth. But just like Buddha, he won't be able to explain that truth he found out, to the world, since that truth is beyond description or beyond comparison. I feel most agnostics will finally become personalities like J.Krishnamoorthy and Buddha, provided they do not try to seek intellectual answers to the riddles of the universe. Krishnamoorthy as an orphan was hand-picked by late Annie Besant to become a great leader of the Theosophical society. But as time went on Krishnamoorthy transcended all positions and power and questioned the integrity of every minute things in every religion. Finally, he became an institution in himself, without an iota of ego. Of course, Krishnamoorthy was not an agnostic at all. He was a logician with great capabilities. So as far as Hinduism is concerned agnosticism is the starting point of relentless pursuit after truth.

Son, I come from a very religious family and as such I believe in God and sometimes even in a very personal God. Sometimes I see God as an entity without any feelings or consciousness. According

to the time and place, my concept of God changes. When I was a teenager I did not have any problem to visualize IT as Lord Krishna but when I became older I see IT as a power- source, something beyond my wildest imaginations. I have no problem to listen to a person who describes IT as Lord Krishna or as Jesus Christ or as Allah or as Jehova or as Buddha or anything else, nor I have any problem to listen to any who describes IT as a Formless, Imperishable, Timeless, Unborn. Indescribable entity. One thing I know for certain. We are all part and parcel of nature. We are just instruments of an unknown entity or energy or power or something beyond definition. On one side we are just an amalgamation of chemicals, we are just an array of DNAs and still on other side we are conscious entities. Honestly, I am at total loss for words whenever I think of God...To begin with I do not know where to start and the more I read about IT, the more I study modern science, the more curious I am about God and the universe.

That does not mean religions have all the answers. All religions of the world have not fully explained many of their fundamental principles either. Anyway, the lack of proper answers make me a very humble person. Today, I know for sure that we know very little about us as well as about the universe.

The roots of Hinduism reach deep into pre-historic hoary past. It has evolved over these millennia, and still this process continues. Dynamism, tolerance, catholicity, assimilation, inclusiveness, optimism and unity in diversity have always been its hallmarks. Its multiplicity is more apparent than real. In the ultimate analysis, Hinduism oroves to be a great synthesis of many diverse and even conflicting and contradictory trends and elements. Thus, its multiplicity and ambivalence are not only incompatible with the concept of essential unity of life and its creator, but also mark its strength. The Vedas and Vedanta form the earliest source of our knowledge of Hinduism. The Vedanga literature reflects mainly the early ritual-side of the Hindu way of living. So do the Puranas, as they throw significant light on the various mundance aspects of later Hinduism. The two Epics and the Gita also delineate the basic tenets of Hinduism, and underline the desirability of dharma and righteous living, leading to ultimate triumph of the forces of good

over evil.

The realization of Reality or Self, leading to final liberation, is one of the fundamentals of Hinduism. In this sense, yoga is effloresecence and fruition of Hinduism. Hinduism is not only a religion, but also a way of living and thinking. As such, its contribution towards world heritage and culture has been quite tremendous and unparalleled. Hinduism has exercised a great influence on world-minds in respect of abstract speculation, religion, arts and science. The well-known six systems of Hindu philosophy, are still a great force to be reckoned with. Thus, it has been a kindly light on the path of Pilgrim's Progress of humanity. One of the most characteristic qualities of Hinduism, is that it never believes in conversion, and there has never been a recognizable attempt at proselytization. There is no religious conquest on record. It has had been a great living force in the life of millions of people on the subcontinent and in foreign lands.

In spite of its many drawbacks such as casteism, untouchability, superstitions, dogmas, and other ills. Hinduism is rational and scientific at its core. These shortcomings and ills may touch it, but they can never penetrate its spirit. In this sense, many of the ills of Hinduism can be said to be extraneous and peripheral. But they are to be condemned in no uncertain terms, and must be eliminated.

Hindu population spread over throughout the vast land of India has a common basis of religious faith which furnishes a good evidence of the original unity of the Aryan inhabitants of this country during pre-historical days. Hinduism is like a big fig- tree growing from a single stem and then sending out numerous branches destined to strike roots to the ground and themselves becoming big trees in their own right. Thus a simple pantheistic doctrine has spread out into a vast polytheistic system with innumberable gods and goddesses and mass of mythological literature.

Popular Hinduism supposes that one Universal Being, call Him Brahm or Omkar, adopts so many appearances—each one having its distinctive character or displaying in part some one or more attribute of the Almighty, and this provides the basis of polytheism and the pantheon of gods and goddesses. There is a sacred number

constantly appearing in Hindu religious system. Agni, Indra and Surya constitute the Vedic triad of gods. There are frequent allusions in Vedas to Thirty Three gods, which again is a multiple of three. Although Trimuriti is not named as such in the Vedic hymns yet Veda is the basic source of this Triad of godly personifications. Vedic poet-seers had the tendency to group all the forces and energies of nature under three heads and the proliferation of the number of gods into thirty three was the assertion that each of the leading personifications was capable of eleven transformations. The trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv holding the biggest sway in Hindu mythology today has not only its seed but even its root in the Vedas.

In the well-known hymn of the Rig Veda elucidating the mystery of creation given in Mandal X, 129, we perceive the first enunciation in world's religious literatre of the idea that the Creator willed to create the universe through the agency of a female principle. This idea was expressed in the supposed marriage of heaven and earth and the Sankhya philosophy's union of Purush and Prakriti. It gathered so great a strength that later on every principal deity of Hindu mythology had his own female companion, who shares the worship paid to male god, e.g., Sita and Ram, Parvati and Shiv, Radha and Krishna, Lakshmi and Vishnu.

As referred to above Hindu religion is today a huge structure which has spread over to an immense surface by continuous additions and accretions. All creeds and cults have found in it a refuge and home. It has even accepted Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu. Universal tolerance and receptivity is the hall-mark of Hinduism. The preference of one-group to the worship of god Shiv may be termed Shaivism, while the tilt in favour of god Vishnu may be called Vaishnavism but these are never considered as opposite or incompatible creeds. Both accept and acquiesic to a certain extent in each other's views while laying an exaggerated veneration to one distinct deity. In most of the temples scattered all over India so many deities like Ram, Krishna, Shiv, Ganesh and others are put together and devotees pay equal homage to all.

Incarnation of God in this world is an important facet of Hindu

faith. This view holds that God descends from His abode to earth in order to eradicate evils and sins whenever they start prevailing upon virtue and good deeds. Vishnu is the only member of the Trimurti who can be said to take human form in flesh and blood for the salvation of the world in times of peril and calamity. In Purans certainly there are found references of various gods adopting shares of human being or animals but the term 'Avatar' (reincarnation) in its proper connotation is accepted as applying to the descent of Lord Vishnu on earth. For example, there is a form of Shiv called Virbhadra (according to a few he is Shiv's son). He is depicted as fierce with a thousand heads, eyes and feet. There are also eight Bhairavs who are all various forms of Shiv. Still these are not called as Avtars.

The doctrine of bhakti (personal devotion and surrender), which though existing in small measure earlier, found full play in the epic age. Vaishnavs enjoin their followers complete devotion to Ram or Krishna, Shaivites ask for full surrender to Shiv while Shaktas call for the same attitude towards Durga, and Ganpatyas claim the same supreme status for Ganesh.

The practice of idol worship representing homage to gods, goddesses and minor deities is today an insperable part of Hindu religious system. There is not even one country in the world which can claim to have so many temples and shrines dedicated to gods and goddesses under different forms, images, symbols and names. The temples of the first category found in the greatest number are those of the principal gods, namely Shiv and Parvati are seen in almost all temples. In the South are commonly found the shrines of the other son of Shiv, named Kartikeya. Secondly are found all over India shrines dedicated to monkey-god Hanuman and to the terrible form of Parvati, namely Durga. In some cities like Varanasi besides the important shrines there are also found a few temples of Navgrah (the nine planets), which symbolised as nine gods, are generally being conciliated before marriage ceremony and a few other auspicious family functions.

Though carved images of some gods like Indra, Varun, Kuver, Kama, Parsuram, Yam and Varah are scattered in the land here and

there, shrines dedicated exclusively to them are seldom found: so also is the case with animal gods like Garud, Sheshnag and Cow Annapurna.

Idols in temples of towns and cities do not exhaust the images worshipped by Hindus. In smallest of villages and most neglected localities, at the top of hills, on raised plateus and below stately trees one can see, if not an unfinished or dilapidated temple, at least rough idols or simple blocks consecrated to some local god or deity by putting sindoor (red paint) over it.

Hinduism History and Heritage

'Hinduism' is a modern term, but it represents the ancient most living religion and culture of the world. In ancient times Hinduism was called 'Brahmanism' or 'Vedantism'. It is also called the 'Sanatana Dharma'. 'Sanatana' means eternal and ever lasting, and 'Dharma' means something which upholds or maintains. Thus 'Saratana Dharma' stands for the law which upholds and mantains life and order. It also underlines the fact that Hinduism has neither a beginning nor an end. It is eternal and everlasting and its beginning cannot be fixed in terms of time and its originator. Like Christianity and Islam, Hinduism does not owe its origin to one prophet or a religious book. It has evolved through these epochs and ages and still continues to grow. There is no single human agency or personality at the root of Hinduism. Hinduism is the religion of the majority in India, and over 80% of the Indian population are the Hindus. It is eternal and everlasting in this sense also that it has escaped the fate that overtook the religions of Egypt, Mesoptamia and Babylonia of ancient times.

'Hindu', 'Hinduism' and such other related words are Persian in origin, and are derived from the word 'Sindhu', the river.. 'Sindhu' became 'Hindu' in Persian, and then the people living in the region of the Sindhu river were called the Hindus and their religion Hinduism. The terms' 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' were later extended to the people of the whole sub-continent and their way of living and thinking. In the beginning the extent of the people and their civilization were actually far more widespread than the expanse indicated by such words as Hindu and Hinduism. In Greek Sindhu

became 'Indus', and from it were derived India and Indian. Thus 'Indian' is an anglicised word meaning the 'land of Indus'. Hindu now cannotes the whole spread of religious, cultural and philosphical way of thinking and living of the entire sub- continent.

The word 'Hinduism' is geographical in origin, and geography has played a very vital role in the growth and formulation of the thinking and practices of the Hindus. Obviously, Hinduism is a product of the interplay of the forces of Indian geography and ancient Indian genius. India's geographical features have considerably influenceld, both directly and indirectly, her religion and way of living. India is a vast country, a sub- continent with her fantastic and formidable an arc of the Himalayas in the extreme north, and the vast sea round her southern peninsular plateau. India's great latitudinal spread, encompassing a wide range of climates and temperatures, made it rich for the the advent and development of a great and multi- dimensional religion such as Hinduism and its off-shoots like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

The vast plains of the Sindhu and the Ganga, one of greatest stretches of the flat alluvial areas of our planet, were the cradle-ground of early Hindu religion and culture. The great size, the splendid isolation, the protection provided by the mighty Himalayas and the seas, the rich and fertile alluvial soil, abundant rain and the generous bounty of nature made India a fit ground for intellectual pursuit, philosophical speculations and abstract thinking. It is India's characteristic geographical features, which have imbued the Indian wisdom with great maturity and matchless mellowness. In spite of numerous geographical regions, different climates, etc., India has been culturally and religiously one and unified. Hinduism, as a religion and cultural force, has been a great unifying single force in India. Amidst diversity of rituals and customs, there can be seen a certain uniformity and similarity at higher religious and intellectual levels. It were India's mountains, rivers, forests and sea-shores that exencised an abiding influence on Hindu speculation and way of life. For a Hindu they all have a deep divinity about them, and so they are worshiped and deified. The Himalayas have been the abode of the Hindu gods and goddesses. It is on the banks and confluences of the rivers that

many Hindu pilgrimage centres are located. It was in the sylvan forests that the Hindu tapovans, retreats, hermitages and gurukulas were situated, where the aspirants, rishis and students practised austerities, tapas and learning. It was here in the forest retreats that Upanishads were born and developed.

It is the religious thinking and affinity, coupled with moral values and abstract thinking, which cuts across all geographical and political barriers. In spite of diverse ritual practices, attitudes and thinking, a single ideology prevails at a deeper level. It is again the bounty of nature that helped considerably in making the Hindus so tolerant, catholic, non-violent and generally vegetarian. They developed a sense of affection, bordering veneration to the cow in particular and other animals and birds in general. Consequently, many birds and animals came to be associated with Hindu deities, and they became their vehicles and mounts.

Nature had destined India to develop her religion in a splendid isolation, and yet there is no other land that has had such a rich and varied intercourse with so different peoples, religions, cultures and thinking. Geographically isolated, but historically it has been a great meeting point of various cultures and civilizations all these centuries. India and its religion (s) have outlived the test of time and invasions. Empires have risen and fallen, kings have come and gone like bubbles, but India with her vibrant culture and Sanatana Dharma continues to march forward triumphantly. Diversity and assimilation have always been the hall-mark of this eternal land. Many races and conquerors came, but they all lost their individualities in this marvel of the Indian melting pot.

Hinduism represents a succession of rich cultural epochs. Since its beginning in dim and hoary pre-historical past, its flow has been steadily maintained without interruption. It is very comprehensive and inclusive religion, but its diversity is not incompatible with its underlying essential unity. It represents a formidable synthesis of numerous elements, all fused together into a great organic whole. Hinduism, in fact, is a rainbow coloured fabric and a symphonious way of life. This immense synthesis and symphony has been the result of ceaseless efforts of Indian wisdom since days dating back

to five-six millennia. It is a composite religion, a veritable ocean to which many rivers and streams of religions, races and cultures have meaningfully contributed in their own way. The diversity of its creeds, dogmas, rituals, images and idols is simply external and instrumental. Its many facetedness does not mean that Hinduism is an amalgam of diverse religions, faiths and attitudes. The spiritual growth and evolution involves many stages from the lower forms of worship to the higher ones, and hence it allows the soul to evolve in full freedom according to its capacity and inclination. It does not believe in uniformity, regimentation or conversion, for they would defeat the very purpose of the religion.

The Hindus are the lineal descendants of the famous ancient Aryan race. In the beginning the Aryans were confined to the Sapta-sindhu region between the rivers Sindhu or Indus and the Sarasvati, now lost. This region was then called 'Brahmavarta' or 'Aryavarta'. Gradually the Aryans spread out to the Gangetic plain and the regions further east and south of the country. By the time Aryanization and Aryan settlement in the south were almost complete, the country came to be known as 'Bharata' or 'Bharatavarsha', after the great Bharatas, whose descendants fought a terrible battle among themselves known as Mahabharata. Even today the country is called by its traditional name 'Bharata'.

The Aryans came from out of India, and with that began a new epoch and a transition from the Mohenjo-daro, Harappan urban civilization to a predominently rural and pastoral way of living and speculation. The Aryans were possessed of refined poetic sensibilities and were far more advanced in the use of metals, economy, industry and means of transportation. They were vigorous and a fighting race, and had no difficulty in assimilating partly the Indus-Valley civilization and religion.

The fact that Indus Valley civilization and religion are closely related to Hinduism have been amply borne out by the terracotta figurines, seals, etc., found there in the excavations. The practice of penance, yoga, worship of Shiva or Pashupati and Mother Goddess as deities of fertility were part and parcel of Harappan religion. They were later incorporated into Hinduism. The iconic and phallic

worship, pre-eminence of Mother Goddess Durga or Kali, ascetic and yogic practices of Hinduism can be directly traced to Harappan religion, which was essentially pre-Vedic and non-Aryan. The Aryans were definitely more vigorous and a fighting race. They possessed fine horses, chariots, and arrows of iron. They were superior to the Harappan people, but religiously and culturally the Harappans were better placed than the Aryans. And so the Aryans incorporated into their religion a lot of already existing Indian religion and culture. Therefore, Aryan religion and culture did not in any way imply the regression in the scale of progression but rather it marked an advancement, synthesis and assimilation of already existing cult into the exuburant and ever-growing Hinduism. The discovery of the Indus Valley civilization has pushed the history of Indian religions and culture as far back as 3500 B.C. Thus in Harappan religion can be seen the ancestor of Hinduism. How did this wonderful religion and culture came to an end? Perhaps the successive waves of the Aryan invasion caused it, but the invaders wisely imbibed and assimilated many religious elements of the conquered. The recurrent images of Proto-Shiva with exposed phallus, the Bull, and statutes of nude female, with a plant issuing forth from the womb, do anticipate many predominant features of the early Brahmanism and later Hinduism.

The earliest source of our knowledge of Hinduism are the Vedas and the Upanishads. These are the ancient most monuments of Hindu culture and religion. They form the rock foundations of the magnificent edifice of Hinduism, and also of its off-shoots and extensions like Buddhism and Jainism. The Vedas are a whole body of literature and their parts represent successive stages in the evolution of Hinduism. The exact time of their composition is difficult to trace out. The earlier limit of the Vedas is placed somewhere between 2000 and 2500 B.C. The Vedic literature was handed down orally from one generation to another till it was written down sometime one millennium B.C. The Rigveda is the oldest of the Vedas. The three more Vedas were composed during the later Vedic period. These are Yajur, Sama and Atharva Vedas. All these great and ancient religious books of the Hindus consist of three parts, that is, Samhitas, Brahmanas and Aranyakas. Samhitas

are the collection of sacred hymns in verse and belong to the earliest stage. They are addressed to various male and female deities. The Brahmana portions are mostly in prose and describe in detail the rites and rituals. The Aranyakas (forests treatises) are in a sense supplements and continuation of the Brahmanas. These three parts form the Vedas proper. The Upanishads or the Vedant, which mark the culmination of the abstract speculation and contain the richest philospphical and religious teachings, are mostly parts of the Aranyakas or the Forest Treatises. Many Aranyakas are now lost, and only the Upanishadic portions of these profoundly philosophical books have escaped the erosion and ravages of time. There are many Upanishads, but the principal ones are sixteen or so in number. This whole literature contains deep spiritual truths and philosophy. The central teaching of the Upanishads underline the identity of the Supreme Soul and the individual Soul. "Tatt-twam-asi" (That thou art!) can be said the quintessence of Vedant and Hinduism. That stands for Brahman, the Supreme and Universal Soul or the Cosmic Purusha.

Then comes Vedangas or Sutra literature consisting of such works as Kalpasutras, the Grihyasutras and the Srautasutras. This literature deals with supplementary sciences or the lower knowledge. These books describe in detail the rules of ceremonies, sacrifices and such rites as belong to conception, birth, wedding, funeral, initiation and other customs, usages and rituals of Hindu domestic life. This literature is important for the interpretation of the Vedas as it contains the rules regarding the use of various mantras, hymns, prayers and incantations.

The Vedic literature is isoteric and contains spiritual truths, not fully expressed but implicitly revealed. The Sutra literature and Puranas are essentially exoteric and deal with external social and domestic conduct and rituals. So are two national epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Ramayana is the epic poem composed by the sage and Adi Kavi Valmiki. It deals with the adventures and exploits of hero Rama. Rama, the incarnation of Vishnu, upholds Dharma and maintains righteousness by his most noble deeds and exemplary actions. Rama, the embodiment of Hindu excellence is held in the highest honour and the worship

paid to him, his consort Sita and devotee monkey-god Hanuman, the epitome of selfless service, devotion, faithfulness, obedience and manly strenght, is of the purest nature. Another great Hindu epic, the Mahabharata's authorship is attributed to Krishna Dwaipayana or Vyasa. It relates the great war fought among the Bharatas, and is the longest epic poem in the world. The Kauravas and the Pandavas, the descendants of the Bharatas through Puru of the Lunar dynasty, fought a terrible war for the kingdom of Hastinapur. The most important part of the Mahabharata is the portion in which Krishna the manifestation of the highest divinity, expounds to Arjuna the most profound truth of Vedanta and Yoga in the form of a dialogue called the Bhagavad Gita. The Gita or the Song Celestial is one of the greatest philosophical works which has exercised a powerful influence on the Hindus for the last many centuries. The Mahabharata is later than the Ramayana, but it is not possible to give the dates of composition of these two great epics, though the question of exact chronology has troubled the minds of the scholars for long.

The Puranas are the later sacred literature of the Hindus. The principal Puranas are 18, but it is difficult to give their exact chronology or their date of composition. Many of them certainly existed before the coming of Gautam Buddha, but some of them are of the later period. They are rooted in the Vedas and represent a later and more elaborate development of Hinduism. The Puranas deal with powers and deeds of the gods, heroes, saints and ancestors of the human race. Didactic in spirit, they are dedicated to some god or the other and his cult. They were chiefly meant for the comon people, who had no access to, and understanding of the abstract speculations of the Vedas and the Vedanta. Thus, the Puranas as sacond grade. The Puranas are valuable in the sense that they throw a great deal of light on various aspects of Hinduism. The Puranas served the purpose of educating the masses and the unlettered Hindus through their tales, legends, mythology, rituals, theism and pantheism. The Puranas are in verse and their form is always that of a dialogue between an exponent and an enquirer or aspirant, interspersed with the comments and observations of other people. Of the Puranas, the Bhagavata Purana is the most popular

among the Hindus. It is called Bhagvata because it is dedicated to Bhagvata or Vishnu. In its tenth book is related in detail the life of Krishna, the manifestation of Vishnu. The Puranas as scriptures are the great authorities of Hinduism and have a considerable influence on Hindu thinking and religious practices. The two great epics, mentioned earlier, also partake of the character of the Puranas. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata Purana are still read and recited with great delight and interest during certain months of the year among the Hindus. Puranas are pluralistic and sectarian in their approach, yet they never completely lose sight of the monatheistic conception of God or Reality.

Yoga 'the science of the soul', a sure means of spiritual discipline and the realization of the Reality, is one of the fundamentals of the Hinduism. As one of the Shaddarshanas or the six schools of philosophy, it was founded by rishi Patanjali. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, is well known all over the world. This school emphasizes the practice of meditation as chief means of final liberation. In a broad sense, yoga is an integral part of all Hindu systems and practices. The need for yogic discipline is also underlined in the Upanishads. Yoga makes the whole being of the aspirant ready to be in direct touch with the cosmic consciousness. Yoga quickens spiritual evolution by making a yogi's nature refined, disciplined and more rhythmical. As a psychic discipline and training, yoga makes individual's life richer by revealing the subtler and finer aspects of the individual's consciousness.

The other schools or systems of Shad-darshanas include the Nyaya philosophy of Gautama, the Vaisheshika school of Kanada, the Sankhya system of the sage Kapila, the Purva Mimansa of Jaimini and the Uttara Mimansa or The Vedanta philosophy. All these systems have the one and the same goal, the final liberation of the soul and its absorption into the Supreme Soul, but the paths are different. The Nyaya system is based on reasoning, analysis and dialectics and therefore, it is also called the Logical School. And Gautama is also called the Aristotle of India. The Hindu syllogism consists of Proposition, Reason, Instance, Application of the Reason, and the Conclusion. This school underlines the necessity of clear and logical thinking as a means of final release and

moksha. It is exoteric in its approach and combines both deductive and inductive methods of reasoning, for example:-

1. Whatever has smoke thas fire, e.g., the kitchen.

2. This hill is smoky.

3. Smoke is always accompanied by fire.

4. It is the nature of fire to create smoke.

5. Therefore, this hill is fiery (is volcanic).

Thus, the Hindus were the first to invent logic and reasoning. Vaisheshika of Kanada is supplementary to the Nyaya, and these two schools are classed together as the Nyaya-Vaisheshika. Vaisheshika system traces the origin of the universe to eternal atoms, and so it is also called the Atomic School.

The Sankhya and the Yoga systems have much in common, and therefore they are classed together, but the former is atheistical and the latter theistical. It is based on the fundamental duality of Purusha and Prakrit, or the spirit and the matter. Purusha manifests himself through this Prakriti. Prakriti is endowed with the three gunas, the Sattava, the Rajas and the Tamas. The dualism of Purusha and Prakriti, or the soul and matter and the atheism of the Sankhya were modified to suit the later popular Hinduism and its manifestations in montheism and pantheism.

The Purva Mimansa of Jaimini and Uttara Mimansa of Vyasa are classed together. The latter is subdivided into Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita and Advaita schools. "The object of both these schools is to teach the art of reasoning with the express purpose of aiding the interpretation of the Vedas, not only in the speculative but the practical portion". Purva Mimansa which literally means previous investigation or enquiry, deals with rites, rituals, ceremonies and all that is formal, instrumental and external of Hindu religious practice. The Uttara Mimansa or Vedanta's principal tenets are that "God is the omniscient and omnipotent cause of the existence, continuance and dissolution of the universe. Creation is an act of his will; he is both the efficient and the material cause of the world...God is the sole- existent and universal

soul, he is adwaita, without a second". The three sub-schools of the Vedanta are three successive steps of the same philosophy. They all underline the existence of Brahman as the basis of all manifestations, which is absolute existence (Sat), intelligence or consciousness (Chit) and bliss (Ananda). Vedanta is the most important of the six systems and forms the hub of modern Hinduism. The Brahma Sutras is the principal text of this school of philosophy. Adi Shandkracharya was the great exponent of this school.

The six Vadangas or the Limbs of the Vedas deal with subsidiary sciences. They consists of (i) Kalpa or religious performances, (ii) Siksha or the science of phonetics and pronunciation, (iii) Chhandas or metre and prosedy, (iv) Jyotish or astronomy and astrology. The Upa-Vedas dealt with Ayurveda or medical science, Dhamurveda or the military science, Gandharvaveda or the science of music and Arthashastra or the science of wealth and polity.

The all-pervasive and inclusive Hinduism developed and continues to grow within this broad speculative religious framework. Hinduism is not only the olest living religion, but it is also one of the noblest way and view of life. It has faced many challenges and still there are many at present. But it has taken all such challenges are many at present. But it has taken all such challenges into its strides as an ever evolving and dynamic religion. It has changed in response to the demands of the changing times without ever violating the undamental principles and their continuity. In modern times Hinduism found its fullest expression in the life and works of such great men as Rama, Krishna, Paramhansa, Vivekanand, Dayanand Saraswati and Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was a devout and true Hindu. Underlining its strength and also its weak points, he once said, "I can no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my wife. She moves me as no other woman in the world can. Not that she has no faults; I dare say she has many more than I see, myself. But the feeling of an indissoluble bond is there. Even so I feel for and about Hinduism with all its faults and limitations...I am a reformer through and through. But my zeal never takes me the rejection of any of the essential things of Hinduism ...Hinduism is not an exclusive religion. In it there is

room for the worship of all the prophets of the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term...Hinduism tells everyone to worship God according to his own faith or Dharma, and so it lives at the peace with all the religions''.

Tolerance and assimilation are the hallmarks of Hinduism. The ethnic invasions of the Persians, Greeeks, Kushanas, Hunas and others continued unabated for centuries, but ultimately they all lost their individual identities in the melting point of Hinduism and Indian culture and became one with it. The Hindus incorporated so many elements into their culture from these races and ethnic groups, but they so imbibed and assimilated these elements that they became their own. The process of Hinduization has been quite subtle, continuous and long. The impact of the clien influences could create the ripples and wavelets on the upper surface of the Hinduism, but its inner waters always remained calm and yet respective. These wonderous powers of assimilation and absorption have been operating since the dawn of civilization in this subcontinent. Its respectivity and powers of digestion and adaptation strikes one with wonder. In the past it assimilated the various cultural and religious elements and still it continues doing so the western influences. With each new contact, whether it was with the Greeks, Romans, Scythians, Arabs, Persians or the Christians, it grew richer in experience and excellence. Every successive reciprocation in speculation and culture enriched Hinduism.

At times Hinduism degenerated into dogmas, superstitions, social and religious evils like casteism, untouchability, child- marriage, infanticide, sati-pratha, and score others, and it was beset with stagnation, but then there appeared great souls and heroes who rejuvenated by purging it of superstitious, evil practices and the dead wood of stereotyped customs and traditions. For example, in the medieavel times there appeared on the scene such great socio-religious reformers as Ramanuja (1050-1151), Ramananda (15th century A.D.), Kabirs, (1440-1518), Nanak (1469- 1533), Tukaram, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and others who revived the eternal Hindu ideals of brotherhood tolerance essential unity of all life, equality before God and such other human and cultural values.

They condemned in no uncertain terms the evils of casteism, sati, infanticide, drinking, child-marriage, and superstitions. They provided Hinduism with much needed reorientation and stressed the oneness of God, though his names are legion. In modern times this revival, rehabilitation and regeneration was affected by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), Rama Krishna Paramhansa (1833-1886), Dayanand Sarasvati (1824-1883) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948).

The Hindu hospitality to and tolerance of alien faiths and religions is well-known. One of the basic teachings of Hinduism is that all paths lead to God, and various religions and faiths are these paths. The jews have been living in India well over 2000 years in peace, freedom and perfect equlity. First of all they settled in Kerala and Cochin. When they came to India, they were allowed not only to practice their religion in full freedom, but were also granted rich largess of land and money to built their synagogues. The jews in India are mainly confined to Cochin, Pune, Bombay and Delhi. In Cochin they have a magnificent synagogue built in 1568. They fled the land of their origin Jerusalem to escape the religious persecution and migrated to the tolerant and hospitable Hindu climate of India.

Similarly, the Parsis or Zoroastrians came to India in the early 8th century seeking refuge from religious persecution in Iran. The first batches of Parsi pilgrims settled in Delhi and Gujarat and then on west coast of India in Maharashtra. The Parsis, the followers of Zaruthustra, are an enterprising community and have done a great deal for the development and growth of the country's industry, commerce and finance.

The Christian church in South India is much older than Islam. St. Thomas, one of the first twelve disciples of Christ, was the preacher of Christianity in India. Soon after Jesus's crucifixion, he arrived in India, and began his missionary work. He was contemporary of St. Peter in Rome. But it was much later that Christian Missions came to India and converted many Indians, mainly low caste Hindus. The spread of Islam began in India with the Muslim conquests in the country, but Arab contacts with India

go long back before the coming of the prophet Mohammad. There were some Muslim settlements along the west coast of penisular India before the coming of Islam in India in a big way. Today India is one of the largest Ishamic nations. Thus, in India there never has been any religious persecution or intolerance. In recent times there have have been some communal riots and disturbance, but they own their birth to certain political vested interests and such other factors, and Hinduism has nothing to do with these; Hinduism has never been a militant and violent religion. Its actual strength lies in its vast powers of toleranace, absorption, assimilation, even of conflicting points and resilience. That is why Hinduism has survived the ravages and corrosion of time. It is a religion of reconciliation, harmony and concord.

The immance of God in every living being is fundamental to Hinduism. Every animate thing is sacred and important, let alone a human being. Therefore, there is no room for intolerance or fanaticism on any ground. Hinduism is the path of peace, and it resides in harmony.

The Hindu contribution towards world heritage and culture has been great and matchless. Hinduism has exercised a great influence in the fields of abstract thought, religion, arts and science on the western minds. Hindu influence on ancient Greek culture and early Christianity is an established fact. The Hindu Shada-darshana or six system of philosophy are still a great force to be reckoned. In the words of Mrs. Annie Besant, "They remain as monuments of pure intellection. Remarkable not only for the perfection with which the reasoning is conducted, but also for the training they gave to the human mind; the nature of the things is sought into, and in order that error may be avoided there is the keenest analysis of the tools by which that investigation is to be made". In the words of Sir Monier Williams, a great scholar and Indologist, "The Hindus were Spinozaites more than two thousand years before the existence of Spinoza; and Darwinians many centuries before our time, and before any word like 'evolution' existed in any language of the world". Many modern thinkers of the West like Goethe, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Emerson, Threau, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Walt Whitman, Richard Jeffries, Edward Carpenter have admitted

their indebtedness to Hindu-thought and speculation. Hinduism has been a leading light on the path of Pilgrim's Progress of Humanity.

Hindu Marriages

Most Hindu marriages are arranged by parents. There was a time when the bride and groom would be meeting at the wedding at the wedding for the first time. That system has changed now. Nowadays parents of both bride and groom first meet and discuss the forthcoming marriage. Then the boy and girl are to meet. If they like each other and only if they like each other, the wedding plans proceed. If either does not like the other, the wedding plans are immediately dropped. The following is the most important part of any marriage. That is the checking of astrological charts of both the boy and the girl and to see that both charts match each other perfectly. If the family astrologer sounds an alarm, the wedding is called off. After all this, the wedding takes place in an elaborate ceremony. Hindus do not believe in any kind of courtship before marriage. The belief among them is that love develops gradually after marriage and not before. The sincere love one sees in a Hindu household proves that point beyond doubt. Of course, the tradition of "arranged" marriages is breaking down in India now and "falling in love and marrying" is common at least among educated people.

Hindu weddings differ from place to place. The ceremony is usually held at the bride's house and sometimes even held in a temple. The wedding date for a Hindu marriage is fixed only after careful astrological calculations. The ceremony is performed before a fire lit in a special metal vessel or fire lit in a lamp format. Usually a Hindu priest conducts the wedding ceremony by reciting hymns from the scriptures written in Sanskrit. As a part of the ceremony bride and groom exchange rings and groom presents the bride with sarees. The bride and groom garland each other and at the end of the ceremony the couple walk around the fire a few times. Among some castes, the couple walk around the fire three times and among some other castes the couple walk around the fire seven times (Saptapadi).

Since there are many castes and sub-castes in the Hindu

community, the wedding ceremony differs from place to place. Some marriage ceremonies last for an hour and some even take days to finish. There was a time when child marriages were prevalent in India, but now such marriage is a crime punishable by imprisonment.

Statistics shows that there is not even one per cent of divorce among Hindus now. "Arranged marriages" work because Hindus believe that the union of marriage is predetermined and is a form of Karma. They also work because Hindus, unlike many others, try very hard NOT TO BREAK A WEDLOCK. In Hindu marriages literally the union is not between a boy and a girl but between two families. The girl is given in marriage to a family and not to a boy. Of course, like any other place in the world, India too is changing due to western ideas of divorce and instant love an as such the divorce rate among Hindus may increase as the years pass by.

Hindu Pilgrimage

Tirth literally means "crossing place" or a "ford" and Yatra means "travel" or "pilgrimage". The ford in a river is the safest point from where to cross the river. Anyway a visit to sacred places is considered a Tirtha yatra. Most of the important places of pilgrimage in India have been located along the banks of great rivers like Ganges, Narmada, Godavari, Kaveri, and Brahmaputra. Tirtha Yatra is not only the physical act of visiting holy places but implies mental and moral discipline. Hindus go on pilgrimages for the purification and redemption from sin as per mythological traditions. Some of the most important points of pilgrimage in India are Badrinath (Uttar Pradesh) in the north, Puri in the east, Rameshwaram in the Himalayas is considered a pilgrimage since it is known as Devalaya or 'abode of Gods'. In the Himalayas the most important point of pilgrimage is Gangotri, the point at which the river Ganges starts. The Puranas are the indispensable sources of information about the sacred places of ancient India. Guruvayur temple and Sabarimala in Kerala, Sri Venkateshwara Temple in Tirupati, Kasi, Hardwar, Pandharpur in Maharashtra etc. can be considered important places of Hindu pilgrimage. The most important Hindu pilgrimage takes place during the Kumbha Mela

Festival and the Maha Kumbha Mela Festival which occurs once in 12 years.

Hindu Rituals

Ritual is the colorful art of worshipping deity. The two most pepular rituals are Pooja and Yajna. Pooja is the commonest form of rituals. The Vedas do not speak about Pooja. They contain elaborate forms of worship in homes and temples. One of the main parts of this ritual is the offering of many articles called Upacaras (offerings with honor) to the deity. The Upacaras consists of food, perfumed water, Tulasi leaves, sandalwood paste, incense, flower, ash, clothes etc. The person who conducts Pooja in a temple is called a Poojari. *Arati* is another important part of Pooja ceremony. It is a very common ritualistic waving of lights before the image of the deity. After the Pooja, the householder or poojari distributes offerings made to the deity known as Prasad to fellow-devotees. Prasad consists of food as well as herbal powders.

Yajnas are performed at temporary altars constructed as per Tantric Laws. These altars are made exclusively for Yajnas and as soon as the Yajna is over, the altar is destroyed. Yajna involves no image or idol of God. Most Yajna ritual involves simultaneous chanting by many Brahmin priests. There are two kinds of Yajnas. One done exclusively for public welfare and other done for the good of the householders. Public Yajnas used to be sponsored by kings, but they are now sponsored by several Hindu temple managements and socio religious organisation. One of the most popular domestic Yajnas is Ganapti Homam. This Yajna is done in most Hindu homes once a year by a very capable Brahmin priest. Even though the deity of this Yajna is Lord Ganapati, construction of the altar and performance of the ceremony itself are as laid down by Tantric Laws and no idol is present during the ceremony. A special Yantra (complex geometrical figure) is drawn on the altar and this Yantra personifies the deity of worship. Yajna is usually done for material human welfare. Of course by performing Yajnas a devotee is indirectly brought closer to God, for he fully understands the power of God in his day-to-day affairs.

One of the very ancient rituals is known as Rajasuya Yajna or

"horse sacrifice". It is a Vedic ritual and usually done during the coronations of kings. The term Rajasuya means "King-engendering". It is said in the Mahabharata that the Pandavas conducted the Rajasuya ritual under the guidance of Lord Krishna. In its entire course, this ritual lasts two years. Even though this ritual is associated with the coronations of kings, it also stresses the continuance of the cosmic rhythm of birth and life. Agnihotra is another domestic ritual still practised by orthodox Brahmins. Apart from all the rituals described above, there are a number of Vedic rituals collectively known as Samskaras. Samskara means "refinement". The Samaskaras consist of all rituals from the time of birth to the time of death. There are at least 16 Samskara rituals. They are: 1. Garbhadhana is a ritual to guarantee conception. 2. Pumsavana is to protect the foetus and to have a baby boy. 3. Simantonnayana is a ritual done during the last month of pregnancy for the proper mental formation of the child. 4. Jatakarma is the birth ritual involving the preparation of the astrological chart of the child. 5. Namakarana is a ritual for naming the child. 6. Nishkramana is a ritual of taking the child out of the house for the first time. 7. Annaprasana is the first feeding of rice done usually in front of the God in a temple. 8. Chudukarana is the ritual of first cutting of hair. 9. Karnavedha is the ritual of boring of the ear lobes of the child for putting gold earrings. 10. Vidyarambha is the beginning of the child learning the alphablet. 11. Upanayana is the holy thread ritual by which the boy becomes a Dwija (twice-born). 12. Vedarambha is the actual commencement of Vedic studies. 13. Keshanta is the ritual of first shaving the head. 14. Samavartana is the ritual of home-coming after completion of Vedic studies. 15. Vivaha is the marriage ritual. 16. Antyeshti is the ritual of funeral rites. Rituals performed at death are collectively known as Shraddha. These rituals last 12 days.

Immediately after death the corpse is cremated, the funeral pyre is lit by the deceased's eldest son. The remaining ceremonies are conducted to ease the problems for the soul's journey to the world of ancestors. The ceremonies consist of offereing small rice balls to birds like crows. The crows are supposed to be departed souls. The Shraddha rituals are very ancient, going back to early Vedic times.

Shraddha is done every year for the sake of the departed soul.

Tirtha Yatra or visiting holy places is another very important ritual in every Hindu's life. Hinduism prescribes many rituals appropriate to a variety of circumstances, castes and regions.

Kumbhabhishekam is a very important ritual of temple consecration associated with temple construction. The ritual literally means anointing of the pot. During the construction of temples at Pittsburgh and New York, this ritual was performed. Kumbhabhishekam is associated with very powerful symbolism the rituals of the Kumbhabhishekam are performed in a series of eight sequences starting with a ritual named Swastivachanam, which is a ritual welcoming all guests.

Hindu Search of God

In none of the Hindu scriptures is it said that one has to run away from one's earthly belongings and duty (Svadharma) to achieve God-realization. In fact, the Bhagavad Gita advocates doing one's own duty. After the great Bhagavad Gita discourse, Arjuna did not become a hermit, instead he fought a fierce war. Almost at the end of the Bhagavad Gita discourse, Lord Krishna said to Arjuna, "Mam Anusmara Yudhyacha" meaning "Remembering me, fight the war," which means, "thinking of God, do one's own duty." So nowhere is it said that one has to run to the jungles in search of God. Of course, Hinduism says that the change of mentality from material to spiritual is slow, like a glutton worm which eats three to four times its weight, and finally becomes a butterfly. So changes should be made gradually without frustration. Hinduism advocates the statement, "You can possess things, but do not be possessed by them." King Janaka is a perfect example On one side he was a materialistic king of that century and on the other, he was one of the greatest yogis India, has ever seen. Understand, the Yogi who fights for his loin cloth in the bitter winter of the Himalayas is no better than the cunning business man. Both are possessed by greed and anger. So, change of consciousness is more important than change of outward appearances or change of life styles. That is exactly what I want to tell you again. Even Swami Vivekananda had problem when his master Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa made

him see God for the first time, since his consciousness then was not at the highest level. Vivekananda, then known as Narendra, tormented everyone with his inquisitive question, "Have you seen God?" Ramakrishna Paramahamsa alone answered Vivekananda, "Son, I see him, like I see you" and touched the forehead of Vivekananda. Narendra, who had troubled so may Yogis with his penetrating question about God, then uttered the cry of a lamb. It is said that the power was too much for the great offspring of India to bear and he implored, "Leave me, Sir, I have my mother, father and others at home." (Ref: Life of Swami Vivekananda by his Western and Eastern Disciples). There is no easy way out. God is close to us and yet He cannot come to us. We keep Him away from us. Christ said: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: If any man hear my voice and open the door. I will come unto him." (Revelation 3- 20). Those words reaffirm the fact that without individual effort, without changing the consciousness, God cannot come to anyone, even though God is so close to everyone of us.

Anyone who sincerely seek the Absolute Truth will finally realise the Absolute Truth, even if he/she is totally ignorant of Vedas and Upanishads. All religious scriptures are only aids in the pursuit of truth and they are not a 'Must' in search of the Ultimate Truth. Jesus Christ very emphatically said: "Seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." (Matthew 7-7). So whether a person is well-versed in scriptures or not, if he/she is sincere in his/her desire to know the truth, he/she will finally realise the truth. God appears in front of anyone who surrenders his personal will to divine will. In so many verses in the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna teaches very easy ways by which one can attain Him, the Absolute. In verse 9.22 Lord Krishna said that He himself undertakes the burden of taking care of the day-to-day problems of a devotee, who dedicates himself to Him (God) by surrendering his free will. In verses 12-6,7 of the Gita Lord Krishna said: "Those who surrender all actions to Me and regard Me, as the supreme goal and worship Me with whole- hearted devotion, will be saved by Me from repeated births and deaths." In another verse the Lord said: Gita 18-66: "Give up all righteous and non-righteous actions and come unto Me; Take refuge in Me. Then I shall free you from

all sins; grieve not." Through all those lines God is asking for unquestionable whole- hearted devotion from the aspirant and there is no mention of studying the scriptures at all. There is nothing wrong in studying scriptures, but it is wrong to feel that people who are ignorant of scriptures have no chance for salvation. That is the reason why in Hinduism all methods of God-realization are equally important. The devotional lamentation of a Bhakti Yogi, the selfless actions of a Karma Yogi, the pranayama exercises of a Raja Yogi and the scriptural contemplation of a Jnana Yogi are all treated with the same respect throughout Hinduism. Meera Bhajans, Advaita philosophy and Patanjali *Yoga Sutra* have equal status in Hinduism.

It is easy to say "Salvation", but that is the ultimate goal. Right now, we are trying to achieve peace and harmony in life. In a way we are trying to have a stress-free life. The Hindu way of life aids that effort. Those who follow Hinduism are generally calm at heart and they express their calmness in their day-to-day life. They do not scream and shout when their dinner is not served on time or if they are caught in a traffic-jam or if they have just lost their job. Once in a while, they also get agitated but that state of mind is only temporary. As I told you before, it is quite easy to follow Hinduism because Hinduism believes that ignorance is the root of all evils and true knowledge is the answer to all evils and true knowledge is the answer to all problems. First try to understand the Truth and then try to practise and realise that Truth.

So, most of us who adhere to Hinduism are not trying to become Gurus or hermits or philosophers. We are just trying to have a stress-free peaceful life. If that is achieved, than one has really profited by the study of Hinduism. The methods described are very simple and anyone can practise them. Hope I have made my point very clear to you.

Hindu Temple Construction

To begin with, many. Hindus believe that only saints like Adi Sankaracharya have the capability to consecrate temples. In fact as per history, almost all prominent Hindu temples are consecrated by great saints and constructed by Hindu kings. The actual

construction and consecration of a temple is done as per the Silpa Shastra, the Hindu architectural book. The process of construction and consecration of a temple is very elaborate. To begin with, temples are constructed on a site that is 'Shubha' (beautiful and auspicious), in the neighbourhood of rivers. Under all circumstances, a temple should be built only in very congenial surroundings. Their erection is considered a reintegration of Prajapati (first Man of creation like Adam) enabling him to continue his creative activity. Two of the most important ritual sequences associated with the construction and consecration of any Hindu temple are *Pratishta* (installation of icons) and Kumbhaabhishekam (temple dedication). The Pratishta is the process by which icons are endowed with divinity. The cosmic pillar is an important part of a Hindu temple. It is supposed to be the communication channel between mortals and gods. In modern times, one of the finest temples constructed in the world is Sri Venkateswara Temple in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the construction and consecration of this temple are preserved in a very descriptive documentary film.

'Idol-making's is a very elaborate process. They are made out of special wood as well as from special stones. When they are made out of wood, the tree is cut on an auspicious day and time as per astrological calculations. The artisan who makes the idol is known as 'Silpi'. Prior to making the idol, the 'Silpi' undergoes ritualistic purification and prays to gods for help. It is said that he meditates and mentally visualises the idol, prior to starting the work. After the idol is made, it is purified by water, 'darbha grass', honey, and ghee (liquifed butter). Then by a special Nyasa ritual (touching ceremony) the deity is invoked on the idol. Finally by a special Mantra, Prana or 'breath of life' is infused into the idol. Now idol-making is complete. Of course my description is very brief and the actual ceremony is very elaborate and colorful.

"Garbha Griha?" is the innermost chamber of a temple, where the idol is consecrated. The word meaning of Garbha Graha is 'the home of pregnancy' which actually means a womb. Some temples are with several enclosures and they are supposed to represent the human body which is supposed to have five Kosas or sheaths. The

outermost enclosure represents Annamaya Kosa (sheath made of food) and the deity residing in the Garbha Griha represents Atman or soul.

Hygiene & Aura

Of course, the questions of hygiene and fear of getting diseases have a lot to do with it. Apart from that, like anywhere else in the world, we are also concerned with such simple actions finally leading to incest.

Apart from all that, there is also an occult theory behind not touching one another. According to this theory, everyone has an aura, in brief every creature including plants has auras. This aura is more or less like the corona surrounding a hightension electric overhead line. It is said, auras of Christ and masters like him were visible to the naked eye. The aura of a man is the summation of his thoughts, actions and past Karmas. It is said, for example, that if the person whom we are embracing has "powerful depressive thoughts", it can badly affect our own aura. Similarly our aura will be benefited if we embrace a person with "powerful positive thoughts'. At the same time, embracing amongst the two sexes is equally dangerous, even to God-realised masters, for even they may all under the mighty power of sexual attraction.

So, whichever way you likk at it, embracing and kissing are not good acts to follow as a routine when meeting anyone in our day-to-day life, even if such acts are motivated by very noble thoughts. Again, it is wrong to believe that affection can be expressed only by physical touch.

Modern science has not come out with any proof about the cura's existence. At the same time, it is coming to the conclusion that our brain is a small electric generator and our thinking and actions are just "electric impulses".

Anyway, going back to the question of aura, it is believed that the finger-tips are one point through which this powerful aura can be discharged. That is the reason why, when God-realised masters bless you, they bless you by touching the topmost point of your head, which is a powerful center known as Sahasrara in the books

relating to Kundalini Fower. To protect losing of power from the aura, Hindus show the Namaste sign, (touching the fingertips of both hands) during which they keep the aura in a close-circuited position like two magnets' power that are kept intact by spacers short-circuiting their poles.

In Christianity this, power of the aura is known as Virtue. When Jesus Christ was dragging the cross across the streets of Jerusalem, a leper happened to touch him, and Christ said, "Virtue has gone out of me, who touched me?" Then after seeing the leper turned into a healthy woman, Christ said, "Thy faith made thee whole."Here it is the power only because of her intense faith.

Hindu Vows and Observances

India itself is a gigantic temple and eternal festival. Spiritualism and religion in the form of fasts, festivals and feasts overflows all the boundaries of caste, colour, creed, communities and convention. They establish a new heirarchy, ever enriched by the waters of living faith. Religion in this form always remains enshrined in the hearts of men. India has to offer a fantastic fare of fasts, festivals and pilgrimages. They are deeply rooted in religion, and celebrate mythological events connected with gods and goddesses and great men of religion, but they are basically social in which people of all faiths can participate.

Such events as fasts, festivals and fairs are the occasions for prayer, practice of devotion and piety, thanksgiving, bhajans, kirtans and also of mery-making, feasts, music, dance, shopping, outing and relaxation, in which men and women, young and old, all participate in gay abandon. Here below are given some special fairs, fasts and observances.

Kumbha Parva

Kumbha means a pitcher or a water pot. In the beginning of the creation, the gods under the curse of Rishi Durvasa, were defeated and turned out of their abode heaven by the Durvasa. They went to Vishnu and sought his help. He advised them to churn the ocean for Amrit or elixir. When the Amrit Kumbha (pitcher of nectar) appeared, there ensued a scramble between the gods and the

demons, and some of its contents splashed out and fell at four places.

These four places are Hardwar or Haridwar, Prayaga (Allahabad), Ujjain and Nasik. Now, Kumbha Parva or Mela is held every 12 year in rotation at these places. It is is called Purana Kumbha, and the one held every six years, after the full ones, is called the Ardha Kumbha (half Kumbha. At Hardwar, it lasts for about a month and half i n Phalguna-Chaitra, when the sun passes to Aries, and jupiter, is in Aquarius. At Prayag it is held in Magh (January-February), when Jupiter is in Aries, and the sun and the moon in Capricorn. The Ujjain Kumbha is held in Kartika (October- November), when these planets are in Libra. It is held on the banks of the River Shipra. At Nasik it is held on the banks of Godawari, in Shravana (July-August), when these planets are in Cancer. These Kumbha melas terminate with the final bath on the new moon day.

Kumbha Fair is the most magnificent bathing festival ever held in the world. Millions of people, which include saints, sanyasis, rishi-munis, priests, naga sadhus, mahants and milling crowds from all parts of the country, participate in it. Sometimes, the rush of devotees is so unmanageable that in spite of great preparations for several months ahead, there is a stampede, and the result is a mass tragedy. In the recent Kumbha Fair, held at Haridwar on March-April 1986, at least 100 pilgrims died and scores were injured. And it was not for the first time. The toll was much larger in 1795, when 500 persons died and it was the largest in 1760 when as many as 18 000 pilgrims are said to have perished.

Because the Jupiter, the Sun and the Moon had helped in protecting the Amrit Kumbha from being snatched by the demons, the position of these three planets determine the principal bathing days. During Kumbha Fairs, there are continuous recitation and reading of scriptures, Epics and Puranas.

There are religious doscourses; food, clothes, money and other gifts are given liberally to the needy, saints and sadhus. There are endless processions of mahantas in richly decorated swinging palanquins, of ash-smeared naga (naked) sadhus in endless file, and others with their matted locks, either dangling lose around their

heads or tied into a high knot above. A holy dip during Kumbha Parva is highly meritorius, as it destroys all sins. The ancient Hindu scriptures wax eloquent in praise of these fairs. These reflect the true soul of India, the glory and greatness that India was, and still is, and the living faith enshrined in the hearts or millions and millions of Hindus.

The Eclipse

The time of eclipse is an occasion when the devotees take bath in Ganga or other sacred streams, pools, or tanks and observe piety and devotion. They offer libations to the souls of their departed ancesstors and offer water to the Sun and the Moon. At Kurukshetra, the place of the famous Mahabharata war, people in thousands gather to have a holy dip in the sacred pool. It was here that Lord Krishna delivered the message of Gita to Arjuna.

A bath taken during the eclipse, and the charities and devotion practised on this occasion purify the mind and soul of the aspirants. All other activities are suspended during an eclipse, cows, money, clothes, grains, etc., are given in charity to the poor and needy, brahmins and others. Japa and Kirtans are done, and the mantras or holy formulae are repeated to tap the subtle forces contained in them. Until and unless the sun and the moon are clear, neither food nor water is taken.

The eclipse again takes us back to the baginning of creation, when the milky ocean was being churned to obtain nectar. The churning went on until finally god Dhanvantari appeared, carrying a pitcher full of nectar. It cheered all the gods and demons. But then, the demons stole the nectar-jar. Whereupon, Vishnu fooled them with an illusion. Assuming the form of a beautiful woman or Mhini, Vishnu took the jar and the cup trom the Daityas and Danavas and gave it to the gods. At this Indra and other gods drank the nectar and became immortal and invincible. The gods then defeated the demons and regained their lost heaven. The demons then fled and antered the nether world.

But in the mean while, Rahu, the cause of eclipse, assumed a disguise, and insuniating himself amongst deities, drank some of

the nectar. The Sun and the Moon detected it and informed Vishnu, who cut off his head and two of his arms with his discus, but, as he had already drunk the nectar, he did not die. Thus, his head came to be known as Rahu, and the trunk as Ketu. He wreaks vengeance on the sun and the moon for his betrayal, and swallows them, and thus causes the eclipse. He rushes from the moon to the sun, and then back again from the sun to the moon to swallow them. He had four hands and his lower part ended in a tail.

On the occasion of the eclipse the widows, the sadhus, the mendicants and recluses observe strict fast; the people in general are prohiblted from sleeping, going to the toilet and touching the image of a deity. Bhajan, kirtan jap, meditation, recitation of scriptures, bathing, charity, libation to the dead ancestors, etc., are highly recommended during the eclipse.

Mal-mas

Mal-mas is also called Adhikmas or Purushottam-mas. It is an inter-calated 13th month. The month in which the sun does not move from one position or sign into the other, is called Mal-mas. It occurs after every 32 months, 15 days and 4 ghatis. And the moon in which the sun passes into another signs or positions twice is known as kshaya-mas. First it occurs after 141 years and then after 19 years.

During Mal-mas religious ceremonies are prohibited. The fasts observed and the charities practised during Mal-mas are said to be highly meritorius. They destroy sins. During Mal-mas daily ghee, grains and jaggery should be given to the brahmins in charity. In Mal-mas marriages are not performed, but libations and obations are specially offered to the dead ancestors and Pretas (ghosts). When Mal-mas occurs either in the month of vaishakha, or Jyaishtha or Ashad, it is considered to be inauspicious. In Chaitra it is neither auspicious nor inauspicious. In the rest of the months it is always good. During Mal-mas a grand fair is held at Rajgriha, once the capital of Magadha, in Bihar. According to Purnas at this time 33 crore gods and goddesses descend here, and it turns the place into the most sacred place and centre of pilgrimage on the earth.

Satyanarayana Vrata

This Vrata can be observed either on Sankranti, Ekadashi or Amavasya or Puranmasi. But in Northern India, it is generally observed on the full moon day (Puranmasi) of every month. Satyanarayana or Satyadeva means the Lord of Truth, and it is another name of Vishnu. The merits obtained by observing this Vrata are many. It destroys all sins and evils, and ensures peace of mind, bliss, prosperity, happy relations, health and truthfulness. In the Kaliyuga, worship of Lord Satyanaranyana with devotion, is like the varitable wishfulfilling cow. There are many interesting legends in connection with the observance of this fast.

Once Davarishi Narada happened to visit the earth, the Mrityuloka. Ha was very much distressed to find the people there in misery, ill health and poverty. He wanted to relieve the sufferings of the mankind, but could not find out any way. He went to Satyaloka and told all about it to Bhagwan Satyanarayana. Lord Narayana advised Narada to go on the earth again to tell the people to observe Satyanarayana fast on the day of Purnima or Ekadashi, Amavasya or Sankranti. Their evils, sins and suffering would vanish instantly and prosperity, happiness and bliss would be their sure lot, the Lord told Narada.

Narada returned to the earth and preached the message of Satyanarayana Vrata. People did accordingly. They observed strict fast, lisetened to the story of Satyanarayana, sang his praises and mediated on him, and had all their desires fulfilled.

On this auspicious day, the aspirants should get up early in the morning, after taking bath they should pray and worship Suryanarayana first of all, and thereafter invoke Satyanarayana. They should make a small pavilion with plaintain trunks, flowers, leaves, etc. and install therein an image or picture of Satyanarayana. Then, the Lord should be ritually worshipped with camphor, fruits lamps, incense water, naivedya, betel leaf, etc, and the story of the vrata should be heard from a Brahmin. The Brahmin should be given of grain, fruit, sweets, money, etc. and then prasad should be distributed. And finally in the afternoon the fast should be broken.

There is another story which very beautifully underlines the spritual significance of observing a vow on this day. There was a very poor Brahmin. He lived on alms and spent his days in misery. One day Lord Satyanarayana took pity, and appeared before him in the guise of a Pandit or learned Brahmin. Load ordained him to observe the Satyanarayana Vrata. The next day was Puranmasi. He prepared a simple prasad of baked flour and sugar, and after worshipping Narayana with full devotion and faith, distributed the prasad, and partook of it and prospered.

One the next Puranmasi, he celebrated the fast on a grand scale. A poor wood-cutter chanced to pass by his house. The poor wood-cutter heard the Satyanarayana Katkha, ate the prasad, and being inspired observed the vow himself along with his wife and children, with complete devotion and piety proper for the occasion. Consequently, he become very rich, enjoyed all the joys of life and after death attained the blissful abode of Lord Hari, the Satyaloka.

Satyanarayana vrata is the easiest and most inexpensive way of self-purification and self-surrender at the lotus feet of Hari. One who observes it with full devotion and faith is sure to attain his heart's desire. Such a celebration creates healthy and pure vibrations and purges the heart of all dross and evils.

Pradosha Vrata

Pradosha means the dusk of the early night or evening tide. This vow is observed in the evening twilight, and so it is called Pradosha Vrata. It is observed on the 13th day of each lunar fortnight. It is practised to propitiate Lord Shiva, in order to obtain his blessings and boons leading to fulfilment of one's cherished desires and spiritual upliftment. The evening tide, when the sun sets and the night approaches, is the best time to worship Shiva.

A thing practised at an opportune eoment is likely to bear the best possible results. That is why there is so much emphasis on observing rituals, ceremonies, vows, etc., on a given day at a given hour. Our seers have ordained Pradosha vow to be practised in the evening, because it is most efficacious then. The gods themelves approached Lard Shiva in the most propitious moments of

Pradosha to seek succort in the hour of distress, when they were being harassed and tormented by the Danavas and Daityas. And they were quite successful in achieving Mahadeva's favours and blessings.

An aspirant should get up early at dawn on Pradosha day, and having finished his daily and regular ablutions, etc., he should invoke Shiva and meditate on him. One that day he should not eat anything, Then, again at time of Pradosha, he should bathe and purify and put on clean clothes and sit for ritual worship in a sanctified place. He should sit preferable on a seat of kusha grass, facing east, but never facing west or south. Then, he should offer shodashopacher puja (16 acts of homage) to Shiva with seasonal flowers, bael leaves, fruit, lamp, incense, etc.

To offer even one such puja Pradosha equals scores of other pujas in merit. To light even a single ghee lamp at such auspicious moments, is highly rewarding. Along with Shiva, Parvati, Ganesh, Kartikeya and the Nandi Bull are also worshipped and Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra is repeated 108 times. The priest and Brahmin should be given clothes, grains, a pitcher and money at the conclusion of the ceremony. In bradosha-stotra from the Skanda Purana should be read and recited.

This fast is highly praised by the Puranas, and is of great religious merit. Those who practice it with unflinching faith and evotion are bound to possess wealth, health, happiness and peace of mind. When Pradosha falls on either Monday, Saturday or Sunday, it becomes all the more propitious.

Somvar Vrata

Somvar (Monday) fast is observed to propitiate Shiva and Parvati. The fast is terminated in the late afternoon and either fruits are taken or food eaten, but only once. The Panchak Shara Mantra "Om Namah Shivaya" should be repeated on this day. This japa is highly rewarding. Some people observe it continuously for sixteen Mondays, and then terminate it with elaborate ritual and ceremony. The gift of a cow with its calf given to Brahmin on this occasion, is regarded highly meritoriouc.

During the Chaitra month, Somvar vows are observed to please Jagannath, the Lord of Universe. Generally a person who has been at least once to Jagannathpuri, is entitled to observe such a vow, but even if any one of the members of his family has been on a pilgrimage to Jagannath, can undertake it. Lord Jagannath is ritually worshipped in the late afternoon and naivedya offered. After the ritual, prashad is distributed and dan-dakshina is given to the priest, and only then food is taken.

Mangalvar Vrata

It is a popular fast, and is observed to propitiate Mahavir Hanuman, who rendered great service to Lord Rama. He acted as his spy and fought most valiantly. He helped in restoring Lakshmana to life by bringing medicinal herbs from the Himalayas. He accompanied Rama to Ayodhya and there he received from him the boon of perpetual life and youth. There is no other deity so helpful in time of difficulty.

On this day strict fast is kept, and Hanuman is worshipped with sweets and fruts and Hanuman Chalisa is read and recited. A coat of vermilion mixed in ghee is also applied on this day on the idols of Hanuman. After puja, prashed of sweets is distibuted and only then fast is broken. Only one meal is taken on this day and that too without salt at all. On Tuesday fairs are held at many places near the Hanuman shrines. From Mangalavar Vrata flows success, happiness, strenght, both physical and moral, and quick recovery from illness. It also helps in overcoming the enemies.

Shukravar Vrata

This vow is observed in many forms and for many benefits. It may be observed for the propitiation of the planet Shukra, and to ensure longevity of the son, peace of mind and harmony in the family. It is also observed in the honour of goddess of wealth Lakshmi. Lakshmi is worshipped with white flowers, white raiments and naivedya prepared with ghee and sugar. In Bhavishya Purana, this vow is described in detail.

Now-a-days, it is a very popular fast, and is generally observed by the ladies to please the goddess Santoshi Mata. Santoshi Ma is

another form of Parvati or Durga. Durga is thousand-named. She is Das Bhuja, ten armed; Singha-Vahini, rides a lion; Mahisha-mardini, destroyer of demon Mahisha; Kali, the black; Kanyakumari, the youghful virgin; Ambika, the mother; Sarvamangla, always auspicious; and so on.

As the Shakti or female energy of Shiva, she is both fierc and mild. As Santoshi Ma she is mild and ever auspicious. On this day strict fast is observed and jagaran is done during night, and devotees sing her praises and glories in an assembly to the tune of music. In the morning prashad is disributed after final worship. Some devotees go to Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu, after observing the vow of Friday. But it depends on one's inclination, means and capacity. Santoshi Mata vrata can be observed individually without much show and external exhibition. A vrata is actually a matter of faith and devotion and hardly requires any exhibitionism.

Hinglaj (*-Mata*)

Mother goddess. Hindu. Locally worshipped in northern India and particularly in Baluchistan.

Hotr(a) (*invoker*)

Minor goddess of sacrifices. Hindu (Vedic). She is invoked to appear on the sacrificial field before a ritual and is particularly identified with the act of prayer. Usually associated with the goddess Sarasvati.

Hrsikesa (*lord of the senses*)

God. Hindu. Minor avatara of Visnu. His Sakti is Harsa.

I

Idol Worship

To begin with, Hindu scriptures do not recommend the worship of an image as God. In fact, scriptures very clearly state that an idol in not a substitute for God, but only a means of making the mind think about God. An idol in a temple is exactly like a cross in a church. Both help men to focus their devotion on God.

Again Hinduism very clearly states that mental worship is far superior to worship of images, but all worship starts with images. Ordinary people cannot coneive anything without a form. I every religion God with some form is worshipped. Hinduism has the courage to admit it to the world.

In Raja Yoga, the scientific part of Hinduism, God is looked upon somewhat as pure energy. In that part of Hinduism, there is no mention of God with form. In the Upanishads, God has been described or explained as "Neti—Neti" meaning "Not this—Not this" format. Even the Bhagavad Gita states, "Fools not knowing my unalterable transcendental nature think that I, the unmanifested, am equipped with a manifested form."

So even though God is timeless and formless, there is absolutely nothing wrong in worshipping Him with form. In fact many saints including the late Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa believe that the concept of a personal God (*Ishta Devata*) is very usefu in self-purification.

Iksvaku

Creator god. Hindu (Vedic). One of the ancestral dynasty of sun

gods or Aditi.

Ila

Minor god (dess) of sacrifices. Hindu (Vedic). She is invoked to appear on the sacrificial field before a ritual. Usually associated with the goddess Sarasvati, Ila is linked with the sacred cow and her epithets include butter-handed and 'butter- footed'.

Indology

Indology is the study of Indian history, literature, religions and languages by the West. It started with the publication of a Dutch translation of poems by a saint named Bhartrihari by a Dutch missionary to South India, Roger Abraham in 1651. Bhatrihari's peoms dealt with the customs and religion of the Brahmins. Later, another Austrian Roman Catholic priest by name Fra Paolino de san Bartolommeo wrote two Sanskrit grammar texts (1790) for the use of Christian missionaries in India.

The enthusiasm of the West about India reached its climax, after, Voltaire referred about Yajur Veda in his book, Customs and Spirit of Nations.

The man who really caused the development of Indology, was none other than the first English Governor-General to India. Warren Hastings (1732-1818). He was indeed lost in the beauty of the Bhagavad Gita and he arranged the first English translation of the Gita to English. He wrote in the preface to the first English translation (1875) that The Gita would survive when the British Deminion in India shall have long ceased to exist. Hastings made the Brahmin Pandits to prepare a condensed text of the Hindu Codes and Laws based on ancient scriptures. This text originally written in Sanskrit, was later translated to English and was published in 1776 as a Code of Hindu Law by Nathaniel Halhed.

After Warren Hastings, very many scholars from Europe got fascinated by Hindu Scriptures and they studied Sanskrit and translated much of Hindu Scriptures into English. One German scholar, Gundart came down to Kerala State and wrote a dictionary for the language Malayalam.

Germany is one of the countries in the world where Indology is still popular. Philosophers like Max-Muller and scientists like Oppenheimer (father of Atom Bomb) were fascinated by Hinduism after studying Indology. When the first Atom Bomb was exploded in the deserts of New Mexico, a jubilant Oppenhemer greeted the news by chanting Sanskrit verses from the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 11- 12).

It may not be woring to conclude that even Adolf Hitler was influenced by the Tantric part of Hinduism. From where else, he picked up Swastika and his unique 'hand gesture' which resembled Hindu Abhaya-Mudra? Anyway, that is something left for speculation!

Indr

Tutelary and weather god. Kafir [Afghanistan]. The brother of Gish and father of Disani and Pano. Probably derived from the more widely recognized Aryan god Indra. Indr is known chiefly from the Waigal and Prasun areas of the southern Hindukush. It is generally assumed that he was ousted from major importance by the god Imra. Indr is also a god of wine who owns substantial vineyards and is associated in south Nuristan with wine rituals (the annals of Alexander the Great suggest that he met with wine- drinking worshippers of Dionysos in the Hindukush).

In the Ashkun region of south-western Kafiristan, a famous vineyard near the village of Wamais, is sacred to Indr. Also Inder.

Indra (*possibly meaning mighty*)

Origin Hindu (India). Weather god. Known period of worship circa 1500 BC and possibly earlier until present day.

Synonyms none.

Centre (s) of cult none.

Art references sculptures in metal and stone; reliefs.

Literary sources Rg Veda and other texts.

One of the most important of the Vedic deities. It is uncertain if he originated as a weather god or as a solar deity. The Rg Veda

identifies him with the bull and he is considered to be related to the Hittite weather god Tesub. He is thus also god of fertility and war. In the later Vedas he is described as the son of Dyaus Pita and Prthivi. His consort is Indrani and his sons are Jayanta, Midhusa, Nilambara, Rbhus and Rsabha.

In later Hindusim he is a *dikpala* (guardian) of the eastern direction.

2. In Buddhism Indra is a *dikpala* with the colour yellow, but of lesser importance than the Hindu god.

3. In Jainism Indra is a head of various heavens but, again, of lesser importance.

Indra, the god of firmament and the king of the abode of gods, is probably the most colourful character in Hindu mythology. The ebb and tide of his career, the rise and fall of his power provides a very fascinating story to all, who are interested in the lives of Hindu gods and goddesses.

In the Vedas—rather early Vedic age—Indra stands as the top-ranking figure among gods. Still he is not equivalent to Omkar or Brahma because he has a parentage. His complexion is golden and sparkling, he rides on a golden chariot drawn by two red strong horses with thick and flowing manes and pointed tails. His pet weapon is the thunderbolt which he carries in his right hand; sometimes he is also represented having a big bow with long pointed arrows as well as a big hook and a net, in which he is said to entrap his enemies.

He is the ruler of the atmosphere and the weathers are at his command. Whenever and wherever he thinks proper Indra sends rains as well as thunders and lightnings. As a high-ranking god he had been shown as the preserver and rescuer of cows, priests and even gods. He once killed a demon named Vala, who had stolen cows so that milk may not be used by men for themselves or religious ceremonies. He killed this demon and saved the cows. In the earlier Vedic period he is a very great warrior, who subdued the enemies of Aryans and conquered their forts. During his warfare against enemies of gods he was assisted by other lesser gods—

especially Meruts. He has got more hymns of praise than other gods in Vedas and he was then widely worshipped for his kindness and as the bestower of rains and the giver of fertility. He is shown to have a beautiful consort, who is named as Indrani.

In the post-Vedic period and during the age of Purans Indra falls from the front rank status and is given the lower grade in all respects. Though still the king of other smaller gods, Indra is much inferior to the holy triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv. He is still regarded as the controller of atmosphere, but only under the supervision of the Almighty. Indra in later ages is the ruler of only Swarg, the heaven where the gods live enjoying life in the company of beautiful *apsaras,* the female dancers. He is now shown having great weakness and big faults. He is shown even to have a lascivious character, indulging in sexual wrongs. He tried to seduce the pious wife of sage Gautama, named Ahliya. This enraged the sage, who cursed him to have a thousand wounds resembling female organ on his whole body. When he repented and prayed, these thousand wound marks were changed into thousand eyes; hence Indra is also called Sahasra Chakshu (the thousand eyed).

In the Ramayana comes the story that Ravan, the demon-king of Lanka, attacked heaven and fought against Indra. Indra was badly defeated by Ravan's son, named Meghnad, who since then was called Indrajeet. As Indra was taken captive by Meghnad, other gods under the leadership of Bahma, had to purchase Indra's freedom by bestowing on the demon the blessing of an immortal life. He is very much afraid to lose his throne of heaven and regularly sends beautiful female singing and dancing girls to disturb the penances of the holy men, who Indra thinks may dethrone him.

In the life of god Krishna, he presents himself as one whom the incarnated go teaches a great lesson. He pours incessant rains to drown the people of Brajbhumi, God Krishna raises the mountain named Goverdhan on his little finger and defeats the desing of Indra. Again when Krishna goes to visit Swarg, he wants to carry the divine Parijata tree. Indra opposes it and fights. In the battle too

Krishna defeats him and the tree is carried off.

Though Indra is not the object of direct worship in temples, he is constantly appearing in all tales of religious scriptures as the king of lesser gods.

Indra is actually a position which the aspirant god attains if his divine conduct is beyond any blemish. According to the mythological details even a moral being or a man could get it, like king Nahush got once. But he fell from grace when he tried to lay hold on the previous Indra's wife. Hence whoever becomes the Indra has to guard his position by his good conduct.

Indukari

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Consort of the god Samba. Attribute: a shield

Isa

1. An aspect of Siva. Hindu (Puranic). Also a *dikpala* or guardian of the northeastern quarter, and an *ekadasarudra* (one of the eleven rudras). Rides upon a goat or a bull. Colour: white. Attributes: five arrows, axe, drum, fruit, hatchet, hook, lute, noose, rosary, staff. Three-eyed. 2. Guardian deity. Buddhist. A minor *dikpala* attended by a bull. Colour: white. Attributes: cup, moon dise and trident.

Issaki

Goddess, Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Depicted carrying a headless child. Also Kerala.

Indrani

Goddess of wrath. Hindu (Vedic and Puranic). Daughter of Puloman, a demonic figure killed by the god Indra, and the Sakti and consort of Indra. One of seven mataras (mothers) who in later Hinduism became regarded as of evil intent. Also one of a group of eight astamataras personifying jealousy (also named Aindri in this capacity). In another grouping one of nine navasaktis or astral deities who, in southern India, rank higher than the saptamataras. Her attendant animal is either an elephant or a lion. Attributes: hook, rosary, Santana flower, staff and water-jar. One

thousand-eyed. Also Aindri; Mahendri; Paulomi; Saci; Sujata

Istadevata

1. Generic title of a personal god. Hindu. The name given to a deity chosen by an individual for special worship in return for protection and spiritual guidance. Also the name given to a household icon.

2. Tutelary god. Buddhist, particularly in Tibet. The personal deity of one preparing for Tantric initiation.

Isvara

Epither of the god Siva. Hindu (Puranic). In Sanskrit designated the supreme god who rules the universe'. The generic title of a Hindu's personal high god. In Buddhism the name of a *yaksa* attending the eleventh tirhankara.

J

Jagnnath (*lord of the world*)

Origin Hindu (Puranic) [India].

Transmutation of the essence of the god Visnu

Known period of worship circa 400 AD and probably earlier until present day.

Synonyms Jaggernaut.

Centre (s) of cult Bengal and Puri (Orissa).

Art references bronze sculptures.

Well-known wooden image at Puri.

Literary sources Ramayana epic;

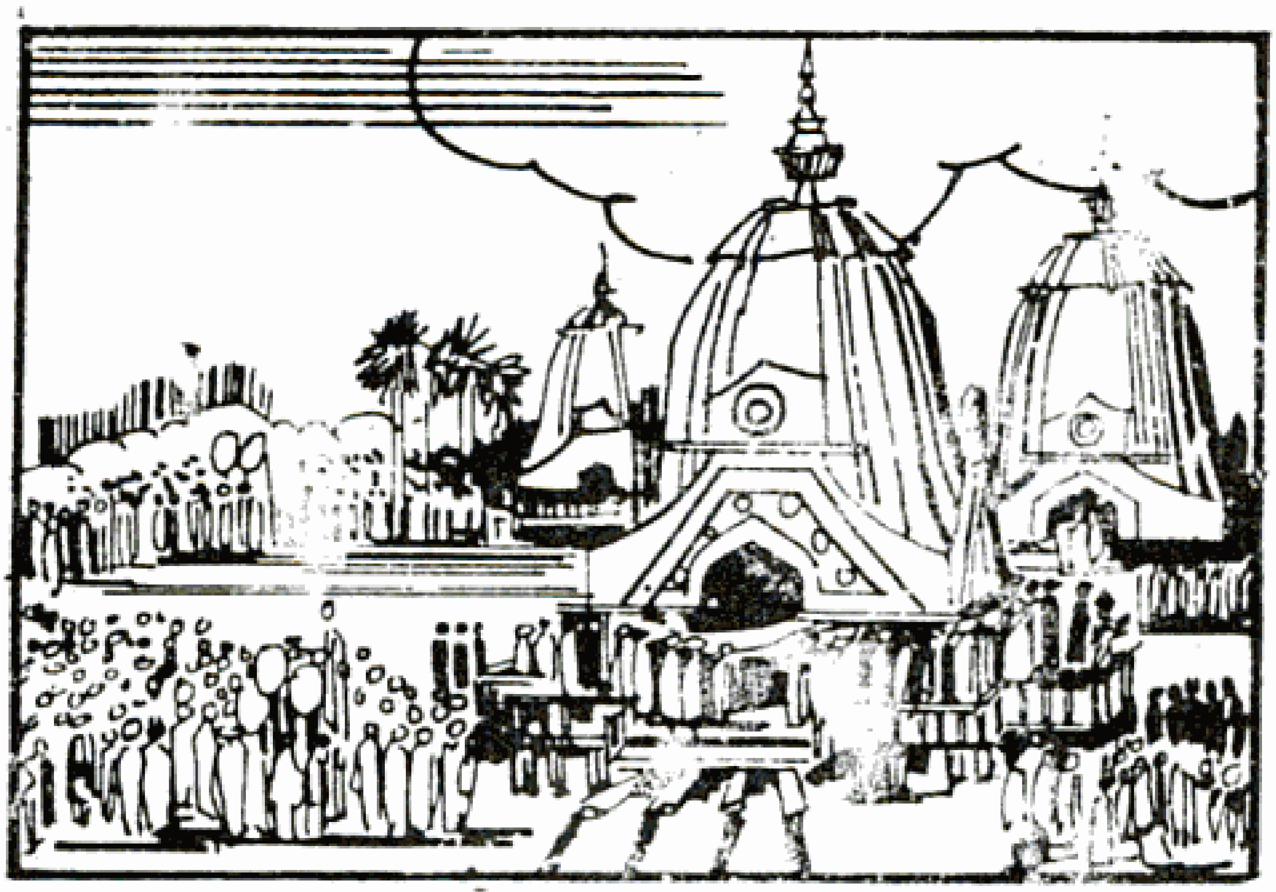
Puranic texts.

Jagannath occupies an obscure position. His sister is Subhadra and his brother Balabhadra. He is depicted in hideous fasthion as a monster with an enormous head and bulging eyes, but with no legs and only the stumps of arms. According to legend, when Visnu was accidently shain by a hunter, his bones were placed in a box and Visvakarma, the Hindu god of artisans, was commissioned to create a new body to cover the bones. His agreement was conditional on no one seeing the work until it was finished. Krsna's curiosity got the better of him and the resultant half-finished freak was Jagannath.

In an unusual departure from normal ritual practice, the image of Jagannath is removed from his sanctuary at Puri for a week each

year and aired in public view. Two festivals, the Rathayatra and Snanayatra, are dedicated to Jagannath and his siblings.

Jagannath, Lord of the world, is the name given to a particular form of Vishnu or to be more accurate that of Krishna. The image of this god has no legs and only stumps of arms; together with him are seated Krishna's brother Balram and their sister Subhadra. The latter two images also do not have legs and hands. These three images in the same form are worshipped in all Jagannath temples, situated mostly in eastern parts of India. But Puri, near the town of Cuttack in Orissa State, is considered to be the real abode of Lord Jagannath and the chief centre of his worship is the great temple complex in that city. Three big statues of Krishna, Balram and Subhadra are enshrined in this temple.



It is a great seat of pilgrimage for Hindus living in all parts of India. Thousands of people visit this place and on the occasion of two great festivals held there lacs of Hindus throng to have a glimpse of the Lord. These two festivals are known as Snaan-Yatra (Bathing festival) and Rath-Yatra (Car festival), held during the months of Jaisth and Asadh repectively. In the first the images are given a bath and in the second (the more important one), the image of Lord Jagannath is brought out upon a chariot together with the other two images. On this day the whole area surrounding the

temple looks a sea of humanity. This chariot is pulled by thousands of pilgrims in the streets and the crowd is so dense that people are known to have been crushed in their attempts to touch or get near the chariot. The word 'Juggernant' in english language denotes the source of its derivation and the character of this festival.

The origin of these statues is in itself legendary. As mentioned in the narration of the life Lord Krishna, he was killed by a hunter. After sometime some people found his remains and put them in a box. Then Lord Vishnu directed one king Indradyumn to form the image of Jagannath and put into its belly these remains of Krishna. By doing this the king would achieve his salvation. The King prayed to God and asked whom he should contact to make such an image. He was then commanded to pray to Vishwakarma, the personification of the creative power and the great architect of this universe. Vishwakarma undertook the assignment of making this image on the specific condition that he would not be disturbed by any body till he completed the work. After fifteen days the King could not contain his curiosity. Being impatient he went to Vishwakarma, who burst into rage at his impertinence. Vishwakarma went away leaving the image without hands and feet. The image had only the stumpa. Later on King Indradyumna as a penance prayed to Brahma. Brahma said that the image would not be completed but he would make the image immortally famous. Brahma gave the image eyes and a soul and also acted as high priest at the time of installation and consecration of the image of Lord Jagannath.

All the three images are made of wood and every twelve years the old ones are buried underground in an unfrequented part of the extensive temple compound. The original image made by Vishwakarma is said to be lying somewhere in a pool near the present temple.

New about these two festivals of Snaan-Yatra and Rath-Yatra, during the first festival the three images are taken out and placed on a large terrace built in an open space near the temple. Here the Brahmins, surrounded by an immense concourse of spectators,

bathe the god by pouring Ganga water on the head amidst the loud chanting of stotras (sacred hymns). After this the Brahmins wipe the deity dry and carry him back to the temple. Then start the worship ceremonies. At this time all the images of Jagannath through-out the country are subjected to the same ceremonies.

About the two weeks after this Snaan-Yatra, the Car festival is held. Before the god is taken out of the temple to be placed on the chariot, the elaborate rituals of worship are performed. This chariot is in the form of an imposing tapering tower between thirty and forty cubics high. It has sixteen wheels, two horses and one coachman-all made of wood. The three images are put in an elevated part of the carriage. A very large crowd draws the chariot and the shouts of joy are loud enough to be heard even at a distance of one mile. Arriving at the appointed spot the three images are taken out and put in a place prepared for them. Here they remain for eight days.

Lord Jagannath's Rath-Yatra attracts huge crowds and such processions are being taken out in other parts of the country too on the same day.

Jalinprabha (*light of the sun*)

God. Buddhist. A bodhisattva or buddha-designate. Colour: red. Attributes: staff, sun disc and sword. Also Suryaprabha.

Jambhala (*devouring*)

God. Buddhist (Mahayana). An emanation of Aksohya, Ratnasambhava or Vajrasattva, or a collective emanation of the five dhyan buddhas, he is the equal of the Hindu god Kubera. His Sakti is Vasudhara and he may stand upon a man or a conch. Colour: blue or white. Attributes: arrow, bow, cup, hook, lchneumon fly, image of Aksobhya in the hair. Jewel, noose, other jewels, staff, sword and trident. Three-headed, each head representing one the three named dhvanibuddhas.

Janguli (*knowledge of poisons*)

Snake goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). Prevents and cures snake bite. An emanation of Aksobhya. Also one of a group of *dharanis*

(deification of Buddhist texts). Accompanied by a snake or other unidentified creature. Colour: green, white or yellow. Attributes: arrow, blue lotus, bow, image of Aksohya on crown, lute, peacock feather, snake, staff, sword and trident. One-or three-headed.

Jayakara (*victorious*)

God. Buddhist. Probably of Hindu derivation, he rides in a carriage drawn by cockatoos. Colour: white. Attributes: arrow, bow, garland and wine glass.

Jayanta (*victorious*)

God. Hindu (Vedic and Puranic). One of the sons of Indra, and one of the eleven *ekadasarudras* or forms of the god Rudra. Attributes: arrow, axe, bow, club, cup, drum, hammer, hook, prayer wheel, rosary, spear, trident and water-jar.

Jayatara (*victorious Tara*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana).

Jaya-Vijaya (*victorious*)

Twin goddesses. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Possibly forms of Durga accompanied by a lion.

Jnanadakini (*knowledge*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An emanation of Aksobhya and the Sakti of yogambara. Colour: blue. Attributes: axe. bell, club, cup, staff and sword.

Jnanaparamita (*perfection of knowledge*)

Philosophical deity. Buddhist. Spiritual offspring of Ratnasambhava. Colour: white. Attributes: the tree of wisdom and a jewelled banner.

Jnanavasita (*control of knowledge*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist. One of a group of vasitas personifying the disciplines of spiritual regeneration. Colour: whitish blue. Attributes: sword on a blue lotus.

Jnana Yoga

Jnana Yoga or Darsanas are known as the Hindu philosophy. There are essentially six system of Janana Yoga. All of them are based on Vedas and developed basing on the theory of reincarnation. All paths lead to salvationl. The six systems of Jnana Yoga are as follows:

1. Samkhya 2. Yoga 3. Mimamsa 4. Vaisheshika 5. Nyaya 6. Vedanta. The Vedanta system is further divided into Advaita and Dvaita systems.

1. Samkhya System: It is the most ancient philosophical system in the world. This was founded by the sage Kapila. This system recognizes no personal God. It sees the universe with the forces of Purusha (spirit) and Prakriti (matter).

2. Yoga System: Yoga is the word derived from the root word Yuj meaning 'to yoke' or 'to join'. Yoga system resembles Samkhya system. Its ideas are based on dualism (seeing the universe as two—(subject and object) and does not talk about a personal God. To some extent, it talks about God as an inanimate object with the word IT'. Raja Yoga and Hatha Yoga are the most important yogas.

3. Mimamsa System: The leading exponents of this branch of philosophy are sages Kumarila and Prabhakara. The Mimamsa system is based on the avoidance of rebirth. Mimamsa means the Start of Vedas. The actual founder of this system is sage Jaimini, who was the disciple of sage Veda Vyasa. Jaimini wrote the book Mimamsa Sutra which is the most important authority of this system.

4. Vaisheshika System: This means Particularity. This is The Atomic School of Hindusism. This system was founded by the sage Kanada who wrote the book Vaiseshika Sutra. It teaches that the Universe is made of nine elements: earth, water, air, fire, soul, mind, ether, water, time and space.

There is no mention of God in this system. God is mentioned simply as That.

5. Nyaya System: This system was founded by sage Gautama. He wrote the book called Nyaya Sutras. This system is primarily concerned with the logical analysis of the world and its atheistic nature. This system resembles Vaisheshika System.

6. Vedanta System: Vedanta means the End of Vedas, indicating that this was written based on the Upanishads which came after the Vedas. The Mimamsa system was actually the start of the Vedas and was based on the Vedic ideology. The Vedanta System was founded by sage Badarayana (Veda Vyasa) who wrote the book called Vedanta Sutra or Brahma Sutra. According to this system, nothing exists except Brahman. The human problem is not SIN but ignorance. The ignorance of the true nature of oneself results in the endless cycle of birth and rebirth.

Advaita Philosophy and Dvaita Philosophy are the two important branches that emerged from the *Vedanta System*. The greatest exponent of *Advaita Philosophy* is sage *Adi Sankaracharya*. Through his commentaries on the Upanishads and Brahma Sutras, Sankara established the Vedanta System. The greatest exponents of the *Dvaita Philosophy* are sages *Ramanuja* and Madhava. Sankara's theory of *Advaita* is that there is only one reality and that is known as the Brahman; Whereas *Ramanuja* and *Madhava* took a position that reality is two: Dependent and Independent. God is independent. Rest of matter and soul are dependent upon God and are controlled by the God.

K

Kadru (*russet*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of the daughters of Daksa. consort of Kasyapa and mother of the *nagas* (snake demons).

Kala

God of death. Hindu (Vedic and Puranic). An epithet of Yama and occasionally of Siva. Also the personification of time in the *Atharvaveda.*

Kalacakra (*time wheel*)

Tutelary god. Buddhist (Mahayana) and Lamaist [Tibet]. One of a group of *yi-dam* tutelary deities chosen on a basis of personal selection. Perecived as time in the form of a *cakra* (rotating wheel) and one who dominates the Hindu gods Kama and Rudra. Sakti with two to four heads. Colour: blue. Attibutes: a large variety held in up to twenty-four hands. Typically four-headed.

Kaladuti (*messenger of death*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). May be accompantied by a horse. Colour: red. Attributes: cow head, cup, hammer and trident.

Kalavikarnika

Fever goddess. Hindu (Puranic). Attributes include a cup or skull.

Kali (I)

Origin Hindu (Puranic) [India]. Goddess of destruction.

Known period of worship circa 400 AD, but known from much

earlier times, until present.

Synonyms many epithets, also linked with Durga.

Centre (s) of cult chiefly in Bengal.

Art references sculptures in stone and bronze.

Literary sources Ramayana epic and various Puranic texts.

Kali is the most terrible and malignant aspect of the goddess Sakti (see also Durga) though the name Kali is an epithet applied to several goddesses. She is the central figure of the sakta cult in Bengal. Her consort is generally perceived as Siva, whom she aids and abets in his more malignant aspects. Also one of the *mahavidya* personification of the Sakti of Siva. In her earliest form she may have been the personification of the spirit of evil.

She is depicted variously with long ragged locks, fang-like teeth or even tusks, lips smeared or dripping with blood and claw-like hands with long nails. Her tongue often protrudes. She has no special vehicle but may be seen dancing on a prostrate Siva. She possesses ten (sometimes as many as eighteen) arms and may wear a necklace of skulls, a belt of severed arms, earrings of children's corpses, and snakes as bracelets. Often she is half- naked with black skin. Kali is depicted wading through gore on the battlefield and drinking the blood of her victims. Frequently she holds a severed head in one of her hands and a large sword in another. At cremation sites she sits upon the body of the deceased surrounded by attendant jackals.

There are also more bening aspects of Kali. She slaughters demons and sometimes her hands are raised in blessing. The conflict of her personality follows the widely held notion that out of destruction comes rebirth.

Kali is worshipped in Bengal during the *Dipavali* festival. In southern India she is worshipped as a distinct plague golddess associated with cholera.

Kali (2)

Goddess of learning. Jain. One of sixteen headed by the goddess

Sarasvati.

Kalika (*black*)

1. Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). Often depicted standing upon a corpse. Colour: dark blue. Attributes: cup and knife.

2. Goddess. Hindu (Puranic). A Sakti of Nirrti, and an epithet of Durga.

Kalki Incarnation

Prediction about the future events or happenings has always been a favourite endeavour of all the religious faiths. Whether it is the Resurrection or Rapture or the Kalki-Incarnation, each faith has imagined the onset of better times in its own way. This occurrence is the natural corollary to the concept that the noble values decay with the passage of time. The Hindu mind is basically rooted to the fact that the world always decays after its inception. Hence the first Age, the Satyayug, was the best period when the Dharma, represented by the holy bull, stood on its all the four legs. Then came the Treta Age in which the moral and spiritual conditions deteriorated a bit and the Dharma lost its one leg. By the time the third age, Dwapar surfaced the Dharma lost its two legs. In the same sequence, the worst age is supposed to be Kaliyug or the present age when the Dharma-bull will be standing only one one leg. In each of these ages the imbalance created by the adverse conditions was to be set right by various incarnations of the Lord Almighty (believed to be Lord Vishnu) in a variety of mortal forms. 'Srimadbhagwat Gita' says that the Lord incarnates Himself whenever there is decline of the noble values and wickedness takes an upper hand. These incarnations come in the mortal forms choosing their manner of entry into the world according to the demand of times. Just after the Deluge He incarnated in the Fish and later in the Boar forms. Since Hirnyakashyap, the tyrant demon and father of Prahlad, was to be slain by a half-man-half-beast existence. He came in the Narsimha form form. Ravan was to be slam by a man so Lord Ram incarnated himself as a human being.

And as it is expected the worse the period the more powerful would be these incarnations. That is, each passing age would demand

more potent incarnation to redeem the world. It is for this reason the prceding incarnation, like that of Lord Ram in Treta, was potentially less powerful than that of Lord Krishna in Dwapar—because of the progressively growing adverse conditions.

It is said that in the present age, Kaliyug, the moral conditions shall be touching their nadir and they would require the most potent incarnation to restore order in the world. That incarnation is believed to be Kalki-Avtaar or Kalki Incarnation.

This incarnation has been described in various ways by the sacred texts. As the future incarnation, Kalki will come at the end of the present Kaliyug when moral excellence no longer exists, the rule of law has disappeared and all is darkness. In some text he is described as holding a flaming sword, and in some as four- armed holding a sword, conch shell, wheel and an arrow, and in some others as a human having the head of a horse and holding attributes as above but with a club (gada) instead of an arrow.

The Mahabharat is more specific in its description of the Kalki-Avtaar. On being asked by Yudhishtar, the sage, Markandeya, describes the Kalki Incarnation. He says that inspired by the Supreme Spirit, in a certain village called Shambhal, a son will be born in the house of a brahman named Vishnuyasha and this boy's name shall be Kalki Vishnuyasha. This brahman boy shall be an extremely powerful, intelligent and valiant personage. He shall get all weapons, armies, etc., at will. Collecting a huge army of brahman warriors he shall go about setting order of righteousness in the world. He shall not only re-establish the rule of Dharma but shall also herald the advent of the Golden Age or the Satyayug of the next cycle of time.

This incarnation shall also be with full potency. It is believed that a Poornavataar or an Incarnation with full potency has sixteen 'kalaas' or phases. Five of these he shares with human beings and other animals—the five doors of perception—sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Another four he shares with human beings—mind, heart, intelligence and the ' turyavastha' or transcendence of intuitive experience. The seven phases that follow are characteristic of a 'poornavtaar', an integral or all- inclusive avtaar. Grace or

reward for effort that fails to be rewarded though it has come from the deserving, 'anugraha' or special Grace whether the recipient merits it or not, the power to create a new order of life in society, new status of consciousness in individual or new objects, power to support and sustain what is inherently good, which may happen to be defenceless; the power to destroy what is evil; the assumption of a form which, whenever it is recalled mentally or in the presence of the Avataar himself, affording a solution to the problem that beholder has in mind; and the assumption of a 'name' which has a similar potency. Kalki Incarnation shall have all these above-mentioned powers to herald the Golden Age of peace and plenty—the Satyayug. Since Kalki will be an Agemaking Avataar, he has to he that much powerful and potent.

Kaliya

Minor serpent god. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of the *nagas* in the endless conflict between good and evil, he poisoned the fresh water with his venom. The young Krsna revived all the life which had drunk from it and then almost destroyed Kaliya before taking the snake as one of his followers. By tradition he lives in depths of the river Yanuna.

Kalki (n) *with white horse*)

Horse god. Hindu (Vedic, Epic and Puranic). Possibly the tenth *avatara* of Visnu. He rewards the good and punishes evil. The counterpart of the Buddhist deity Maitreya. Horses became associated with divine kingship in ancient India because of their speed of movement. Solar deities were perceived to ride horses across the sky and horse sacrifice became highly significant. Kalki is depicted either anthropomorphically or with the head of a horse and has four arms. He is attended by a white horse. Attributes: arrow, conch, prayer wheel, shield and sword. Also Visnuyasas.

Kama (Deva) (*desire*)

Origin Hindu (Puranic) [India]. God of carnal love.

Known period of worship circa 1000 BC. and probably earlier, until present. Synonyms Kama: Manmatha; Ananga.

Centre (s) of cult various.

Art references stone and metal sculptures; reliefs.

Literary sources Ramayana epic and various Puranic texts.

As god of love Kamadeva stimulates physical desire. The son of Visnu and Laksmi, or of their reincarnations Krsna and Rukmini, in which instance he is titled Kama. An alternative legendary begining accounts that he rose from the heart of the creator god Brahma. His chief ally is the god of spring, Vasanta, his principal consort the goddess of affection, Rati, and he is attended by a band of nymphs, the Apsaras. Kamadeva is depicted as a youthful god with green or red skin, decked with ornaments and flowers, armed with a bow of sugar-cane strung with a line of honey bees, and arrows tipped with a flower. He may be three-eyed and three-headed and frequently rides on a parrot.

The consorts of Kamadeva are the goddesses Rati and Priti. Legend accounts that Kamadeva met his death at the hands of Siva, who incinerated him with flames from his middle eye. Kamadeva had inadvertently wounded the meditating god with one of his shafts of desire and had caused him to fall in love with Parvti.

The epithet Ananga (bodiless) is applied to Kamadeva this context. Kamadeva is reincarnated as Kama, who in turn is reincarnated as Paradyumna, the son of Krsna. The god is invoked particularly when a bride-to-be departs from her family home.

Kamaksi (*of amorous appearance*)

Goddess. Dravidian (Tamil) [southern India and Sri Lanka]. A *Sakti* of Siva recognized locally at Kanchipuram, but also in her own right at several places in southern India. Also Kamatchi (Tamil).

Kamala (*lotus-born*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Particularly worshipped in southern India. One of a group of *mahavidyas* or personifications of the Sakti of Siva, representing Maharatri.

Kama Sutra

Kama means the "desire for sexual gratification". As per mythology, Kama Deva (the God of Kama or Love) is a god with a bow and arrow. and when he strikes someone with his arrow, that person will develop sexual desires in him. The legends say that Lord Siva burned Kama Deva to ashes with the fire of his third eye for trying to arouse passion in him (Siva) for princess Parvati. Lord Siva later gave life to Kama Deva and he (Kama Deva) thus became Ananga (bodiless).

The most important Kama literature is Kama Sutra, written by Sage Vatsyayana around 4th century A.D. The book describes the daily routine of an ordinary man. It also describes picnics. drinking parties, games etc.

The book elaborately discusses the art of making love. All the things one can imagine about sex are described in this book. The author has gone to the extent of categorising different forms of embraces, kisses and types of women. The intention of the author may be to teach Man how to woe a woman to become his bride, but his writings are much against the fundamental ideas of Hinduism. Hindus do not even acknowledge this book as part of Hinduism since this book can lead to spiritual decline, rather than helping a man in his married life.

Kamdhenu

Kamdhenu, the sacred cow, is a part and parcel Hindu mythology. She is the cow which grants all wishes and desires. She is the cow of plenty which emerged from *Samudramanthan* (the churning of the ocean) and taken by seven gods, who compose the constellation of the Great Bear in the sky. She is also called Surabhi, Shaval, Aditi and Kamduh. She is the mother of all cows.

According to mythological accounts, Brahma created the Brahmins and the Cow at the same time—Brahmins were to recite Vedas and scriptures while the cow was to afford ghee (clarified butter) for burnt-offerings in religious sacrifices. The cow is deemed to be the mother of gods and is declared by Brahma to be a proper object of worship. The unclean places are purified with cow-dung and in

rural areas still the cow-dung is to be used to rub the ground of the doorway which is the first act in the morning.

Amongst orthodox Hindus she is worshipped on the first of Vaishakh, when the cow was created by Brahma. The milkmen paint the horns and hoofs of their cattle yellow or saffron and bathe them in the river. 'Whoever kills cow or allows another to kill it, shall rot in hell as many years as there are hairs upon his body'. A child born under unlucky stars is passed under the body of a cow to offset the effects.

Moreover cow plays a very important role in the cult of god Krishna. It follows the cowherd Krishna through his life on earth and also symbolises with its four legs the four Vedàs of Hindus. Every part of cow's body has a religious significance. Its horns symbolise the gods, its face the sun and the moon, its shoulders Agni, the god of fire, and its legs the Himalayas. Even Mahatama Gandhi was a great advocate of cow's protection and called it the gift to God.

Cow also symbolises Dharma itself. It is said to have stood steadily upon the earth with its four feet during the Satyug (world's first age of truth), upon three feet durings the Tretayug (the second stage of less than perfection), upon two feet during the Dwaparyug (the third stage of dwindling and disappearing perfection) and only on one leg during Kaliyug (the fourth and current age of decadence).

Kamini (loving womon)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). an attendant of Buddhakapala.

Kankar Mata

Mother goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A *Sakti* who in later Hinduism became regarded as a *saptamatara* (mother) of evil intent. Known particularly from Bengal as a goddess who spreads disease.

Kantatman

Obscure god of medicine. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). The twentieth of the thirty-nine minor *avataras* of the god Visnu and possibly the

same as Dhanvantari, as he is said to be a 'carrier of nectar'. By different genealogy he has been equated with Pradyumna, the god of love.

Kanti (*desire*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). The *Sakti* of Naryana.

Kapali (*wearing skulis*)

God. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of the group of eleven *ekadasarudras* or forms of Rudra.

Kapalini (*carrying a cup*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An attendant of Buddhakapala.

Karaikkal Ammaiyar

Local mother goddess. Hindu [southern India]. Known from the town of Karika) as a deified ascetic who is depicted with an emaciated form. Attribute: playing cymbals.

Karai-Shin

God of lightning. Buddhist [Japan]. One of the deities grouped in Shintoism as the Raijin gods of thunder, storm and rain.

Karini

Inferior goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An attendant of Buddhakapala.

Karkota

Snake god. Hinu. One of a group of seven *mahanagas*. Colour: black. Attributes:rosary and water-jar. Three-eyed.

Karmavasita (*control of karman*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist. One of a group of twelve *vasitas* or goddesses personifying the disciplines of spiritual regeneration-*karma* (n) is an act, rite or deed originating in the hope of future recompense. Colour: green. Attribute: a staff.

Karttikeya

1. God. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A form of Skanda who was reared by the Pleiades stars and is generally represented therefore woth six heads. (In Hindu mythology there are only six Pleiades, not the seven recognized in modern astronomy.) His Sakti is Karttiki and his attendant animal is a peacock. Attributes: conch, hook, noose, prayer wheel, shield, spear, staff, sword and wood apple.

2. God. Buddhist. Equating with the Hindu god Skanda. Colour: red. Rides upon a peacock. Attributes: cock Sakti and staff.

Kartikeya

Kartikeya, represented sometimes with only one face, is generally known as having six faces; is yellow-skinned; rides on a peacock; holds in his right hand an arrow and in his left a bow. He is widely known as the god of war. This god is also known as Skanda, Kumara, Mahasena, Guha, Agnibhoo, Tarakjeet, Shakti Dhuru. In southern Indis he is known as Subrahmanya.

In the Mahabharat and Ramayan epics this god is described as the son of Shiv or Rudra. Sometimes his motherhood is prescribed to Ganga (hence Gangaputra), and sometimes to goddess Parvati, the consort of Shiv. In some legends he is said to have been born without the intervention of a woman through fire (hence the name Agnibhu). This god is depicted sitting around the Shiv-Ling together with Nandi, the mount of Shiv.

The story of his birth runs thus as given in Kumar Sambhav.

Tormented by Tarak, the demon, all the gods under the leadership of Indra, went to the Creator to rid them off this monster. The Creator advised them that only the seed of Shiv can produce a fighter, who can defeat the demon. Shiv was then lost in deep mediation and even the god of lust, named Kama, could not awaken this god. Then the goddess Parvati, Shiv's wife, came forward to help the gods. Once Shiv's passions were aroused none could bear his seed's energy. Angi alone could bear it by taking the seed into its mouth and thereafter transferring this seed to Ganga.

The god Kartikeya so born is therefore called, Gang-ja or Agni-bhu. The child so conceived is also called Kumar—for ever young and chaste.

Another myth connected with his birth states that gods appealed to Shiv for help in repelling the attack of the demons. Shiv responded and assumed six faces, each with a central eye from which six sparks sprang forward. These sparks fell into a lake said to be situated some fifty miles north-west of Madras. These sparks were transformed into six infants, nursed by the six mothers who comprise the Pleiades, the six Krittikas. Shiv's wife Parvati took the six infants into her arms. She hugged them affectionately but in the process squeezed the six children so strongly that they turned into one single body but with six heads. Reared by the six Pleiades (Krittikas), he is mostly called by the name of Kartikeya. He was made the Lord of war and the chief of gods' army. According to Mahabharat he defeated the demons Mahisa and Tarak.

His strength is immense. Onece as a boy, he thrust his spear into the ground challenging anybody to pull it out or even to shake it. God Vishnu took hold of his lance and moved it a bit with his left hand. The result was disastrous; the whole earth shook and the seas, the forests, the mountains started shaking badly. Even the son of Hiranyakashyapu, Prahlad, who was the beloved of Vishnu and very strong, could not move it a bit and fainted while attempting the feat.

It seems that once in ancient times the worship of Kartikeya was much more wide-spread. Patanjali mentions about his images in homes and temples. The coins of Kushan kings bear his name and under the Gupta kings he was worshipped in the whole of northern India. He was also the favourite deity of Chalukya dynasty kings. In southern India he is still widely worshipped. Several deities of the south are associated with him. e.g., Murugan (the chaste boy), Velam (the spear-bearer) and Seyyavan (the red-one).

His story is related in Mahabharat, Shiv Puran and Kalidas's Kumar Sambhav. Kumar is shown riding on the peacock, the killer of serpents.

A complementary story connected with his birth, though not directly with this god, is about the burning of the god of sex and lust, called Kama. As mentioned above the gods in order to awaken the sexual desire in Lord Shiv had assigned this job to Kama Dev. Kama Dev was highly flattered by all gods and he boasted that he could conquer the mind of Shiv within no time. Kama consulted his wife Ratee, who reproved him for this temerity but consented to accompany her husband and help him in disturbing Shiv's meditation. They set off together with Vasant (spring season's god) to Himalayas. Kama Dev pulled an arrow and threw at Shiv. The great Lord, smitten thus, awoke from meditation and shouted who had dared to interrupt his mediation. Looking towards south he spotted Kama Dev. In anger Shiv opened his third eye in the center of his forehead and thus reduced Kama to ashes. Taking pity at the woed and responding to the pleas of his widow, Ratee, Lord Shiv restored her husband but only as a mental image, representing ture love and affection and not just physical lust. Hence the other name of Kama Dev is Ananga (the bodiless).

On the last evening of the month of Kartik, the clay image of this god Kartikeya is worshipped and then submerged next day in the river. At ever great festival associated with mother goddess Durga, his image is also made and set up by her side. Many people, specially females worship this go to have a male offspring.

Karma Yoga

The word Karma is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kri' meaning "to do." The word Karma is used in many senses in Hinduism. Here the meaning of Karma is work. We do Karmas all the time. When we breather, it is a Karma. When we think, it is a Karma, the Karmas we do dictate our Past, Present, and Future. According to Hindusism, all destined duties are good Karmas if they are duties popularly known as Svadharma.

According to Samkhya philosophy, Karmas are controlled by three forces. They are: Tamas, Rajas, and Sattva. Tamas represents inactivity. Rajas represents activity. Sattva is the equilibrium of the two. Karma yoga involves properly employing these three factors, to do our work better.

As I said earlier, the different paths of God-realization in Hinduism are not airtight divisions, but they merge into each other. So Karma Yoga has a lot to do with Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga. Chapters 3,4, and 5 of the Bhagavad Gita deal with Karma Yoga.

Karma Yoga means attaing freedom, by unselfish actions, "Nishkama Karma". Selfish actions retard our goal. Unselfish actions take ustowards our goal. So Karma Yoga is the system of attaining freedom through selfless actions. A Karma Yogi may or may not believe in God or in any religious doctrine. Einstein, Father Damien and Mother Teresa are some of the Karma Yogis outside Hinduism.

The Gita allots three chapters and 118 slokas to explain Karma Yoga. Some of the important points are:

1. No man will reach a state of action lossness (Nishkarmata) by shunning actions. 2. Action is the nature of all beings in creation. 3. He who controls his desires of the flesh and does selfless actions is an honorable man. 4. Do actions without seeking profit, because such actions will ensure salvation for you. 5. Look at me, I am God. There is nothing I have to do in three worlds. There is nothing in the three worlds I need or I can't get. Still I work all the time. 6. A man should do his own duty (Svadharma) A man will meet with disaster if he does someone else's duty. Svadharma, however despicable it may be, is better than someone else's duty. 7. The senses are good. Mind is better than the senses. The sould is better than the mind. 8. In whatever form a man worships me, I will make his devotion steadfast in that form. Whatever path a man may take, it will finally lead him to me. 9. He who performs untouched actions surrendering them to me will be untouched by sin just like water drops on a lotus leaf do not wet it. 10. Actions do not taint me nor do I have any desire for the fruits of actions. He who knows me in this way, no action is binding on him.

Karttiki

Mother goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of a group on nine *navasaktis* who, in southern India, rank higher than the saptamataras.

Kataragama

Tutelary god. Tamil [Sri Lanka]. One of four great national deities and equating to the Hindu god Skanda. Also Ceyon.

Katavul

Supreme god. Tamil [southern India and Sri Lanka]. The ultimate creator of all that exists in the world and the judge of humanity able to reward or punish at will.

Kathak

Kathak, a major classical dance-form of North India, literally means a story-teller or *Kathakar*. In ancient India there were Kathakars or bards who used to recite religious and mythological tales ot the accompaniment music, mime and dance. These rahapsodists and minstrels were associated with temples and shrines. Their particular dance-form, which had its origin in simple story-telling, later came to be known as Kathak. However; Kathak, as it is in vogue these days, is much different from what is should have been in its developmental period. Chronically it has seen many ups and downs through all these ages since Bharat Muni's times. It has survived the ravages of time and hostility of alien cultures and domination, and is today one of the seven classical dances of India.

Traditionally danced both by men and women, what distinguishes Kathak from other Indian classical dance-forms is its spontaneity, freedom from uniformity and a lot of room for innovations and improvisations. For instance, in Bharata Natyam everything is prefixed, and determined, and nothing is left for chance and modernization. All the dancers perform Bharata Natyam almost in the same way with similar stances and footwork. But a fine Kathak dance-recital is characterized by its variety, change and spontaneity. Thus, it enjoys a fair amount of not only of individuality but also autonomy. Conseguently, a Kathak dancer is not required strictly to adhere to fixed steps and stages in a fixed order. He or she can change the sequence of stages to suit his or her aptitude, and style of dancing. At times thee is a sort of contest during the performance in which the drummer plays and weaves a

complex design which in turn is danced by the dancer, specially in the item which is technically known as jagah dikhana. It is a kind of friendly challenge and competition between the two full of innovations and improvisations.

Nourished and nurtured in the sacred environs of the temple, Kathak received protracted patronage from the Hindu rajas, feudal lords and no bility and the Muslim *nawabs* and courtiers. During the medieval period Kathak suffered a sea change; its stylization and formalization took place and it became a confluence of the sacred and the secular. It marks its descent from the high and holy temple-pedestal to the lower and somewhat stage of the royal Mughal Courts. Then it came to be known as Nautch. But gradually there evolved from it a dance-form which now is known as Kathak. It also obtained much of its polish, grace and elegance then, and a number of Gharanas or schools came into being.

Of these Gharanas two, namely, *Lucknow Gharana and Jaipur Gharana* are of considerable significance. The contribution of these two Houses has been far greater in the revival and rise of Kathak danc-form than any other Gharana or School. Lucknow Gharana began in the later half of the nineteenth century, but its full flowering came during the reign of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh. He was a great patron of Kathak and other arts. He himself mastered the art and became an expert teacher and guru of this dance-form. On occasions he would dress himself in the guise of Shri Krishna and dance with his numerous concubines dressed as gopis, and thus they enacted the Rasa-lila. He learnt the art of Kathak from the great Kathak exponent Thakur Prashad ji. His brother Durga Prashad was also a great Kathak-guru. His son Bindadin, took Kathak to great heights and enriched it by composing as many as five hundred Thumaries. His brother Kalka Prashad was also a noted guru and scholar of Kathak. He carried on the tradition of this dance-form and taught his three sons— Achhan Maharaj, Lachhu Maharaj and Shambhu Maharaj-the art and techniques of this dance—form who in their turn became great dancers and earned both name and fame far and wide in this field. The well known Kathak Birju Maharaj is the son of Achhan Maharaj.

The Jaipur Gharana or School's history goes back to the middle/of the nineteenth century. Bhanuji was its first noted exponent. It is said that he got his training in this dance from a saint. But it was Girdhari ji who became one of the greatest masters of Jaipur Gharana dance style. His two sons Hari Prashad and Hanuman Prashad continued this dance tradition and led it to new heights of technical brilliance, glory and aesthetic beauty. They were followed by Mohan La, Chiranji Lal, Narain Prashad, Jai Lal and Sunder Prashad. Hunuman Prashad was well-known for his Lashya style of Kathak while Hari Prashad excelled in Tandava style. Jai Lal and Sunder Prashad made many experiments and became two great pillars and exponents of Jaipur Gharana.

Lucknow Gharana is characterized by its tenderness, grace, bhava (mood), abhinaya or expressional dance through music and mime. Here the emphasis is on grace and subtlety. In aipur Gharana the emphasis is on adoration, ornamentation aspects and technical brilliance, however, both the *Gharanas* have much in common and give equal importance to music, mime and pure dance. The other *Gharanas* are those of Benaras, Rayagarh, Delhi, etc.

Traditionally, the accompanying instruments were the *pakhawaj* (adrum), small cymbals (canjira) and the flute, but they were replaced, under the Mughal influence, with the table, harmonium and sarangi. Similarly the costume of the dancers also underwent a change, and *ghaghara* (long skirt), *choli* (blouse) and a veil gave way to *churidar pajama* and angarkha. Besides many ornaments of gold and silver for head, neck, arms, hands, fingers, waist and feet, the small ankle-bells are an essential part of adornment. These sweet sounding and tinkling bells not only accentuate the movement of the dancing foot but also help in dancing many complex patterns and designs which are the hall- marks of Kathak.

Not unlike Bharata Natyam, Kathak based on Bhava (mood), Raga (melody) and Tal (rhythmic beat), has its compositions based on North Indian classical music. Thes include Dhrupad, Hori, Dhamar Pad and Bhajain on the one hand and Thumari, Ghazal and Dadra on the other. The first category reflects the religius and devotional sentiment while the second one a clearcut erotic taste and tang. The

singing is done by the dancer himself which by implication means that a dancer should be an adept both in dancing and singing. He is to be an expert in abhinaya (acting) as well. The expressional numbers which are in Hindi, Hindustani or Urdu language pertaining to Krishna Lila, legends from the Puranas or a love episode, are retold and interpreted through abhinaya, that is gestures, facial expressions and postures. However, it does not involve any rigid following of a fixed order as is there in Bharata Natyam and Kathakali. Sometimes a Kathak item may be without a chant or singing. Then it is known as Gat Bhava under which the dancer takes a Radha-Krishna episode and interprets it simply through mime only. The dancer plays various roles now that of Radha, now of Krishna and now that of Gopi. His change of character from one to the other is marked by a pirouette from one side to the other. True to life, a Kathak recital includes sculpturesque postures, pirouettes, singing by the dancer, abhinaya (mime) a lot of innovation and both the sacred and the secular flavour.

Obviously, Kathak makes a great use of a number of Hindustani musical compositions. These have been entirely composed for the purpose of dance. For instance, Tarana a pure musical item is used for Nritta or abstract dance item of Kathaka dance-recital. The Dhamar, Bhajan, Thumari, Tappa, Dadara, Kavita, etc. are the Hindustani musical compositions which provide a vast scope for the presentation of sanchari bhava on the part of the Kathak-dancer. The Dhamar and Hori compositions are related to Radha-Krishna legend and Rasa-lila with the gopis, the cow-girls of the Braja-mandala. The Bhajan and the Pada are strictly devotional compositions set to ragas. The Thumari is a short musical composition of four five lines. The dancer repeats each of the lines to bring out its varied meanings and richness of interpretation. As a lyric, thumari consists only of one sthayi and one antra. For example, see this Thumari in Braj Bhasha-

Sthayi : Mohe chhero nahin Shyam

Gujaria men ghar ki akeli.

Antra : Prem ki batiyan men nahin janat

Dur ajahun mero dham.

Rat andheri badar ghere

Chakrapriya se hai kam.

The Dadara and the Ghazal, like the Thumeri, are love-lyrics and are danced at relaxed pace and smooth tempo. The dancer recites each line or word of the piece and then interprets it in dance in as many ways, shades and moods as he can with the help of his imagination. And it imparts Kathaka unrivalled dynamism and challenge.

Conventionally, the Kathak—recital commences with invocation to gods Ganesha, Saraswati and / or Shiva and salutation to the teachers. And then follows That. That is an initial stance in which the dancer stands with the body firm and upright, the right arm bent at elbow and the hand resting on the waist, and the left raised a little over. It may be noted here that Kathak is fundamentally a solo performance. The dancer stands with his feet crossed with the right slightly bent and only the toes touching the ground. There imight be some variations in the That. The dancer introduces the Kathak with the rhythmic graceful movements of his eyes, eyebrows, neck, chest and shoulders while the musicians play at a medium tempo in a relaxed mood. It is sort of warming-up for the full and scintillating dance which is to follow. The hands and forearms are held parallel to the chest and the finger tips of one hand touching those of the other. The hands are then moved outwards and forwards with the feet moving backwards and forwards and in a circle. The dancer makes conscious feet movements virtually standing at the same spot. Tious feet movements virtually standing at the same spot. Then come Tatkar and Tukras. The Tatkar involves only footwork with the hands on the waist or in front of the chest. Tohras are bols or typical rhythmic sound syllables played on the drums (tabalas). This piece of Kathak consists of a series of successive rhythmic designs danced to the drum and the spins three in number or in multiples or three.

Tohras and Tukaras are the compositions of intricate rhythms and techniques weaving a fabric of complex designs of dance

movements. Before every Tohra the dancer presents a pattern of rhythmic syllables. A Tohra may be short or a lengthy one however, it is marked and applauded by the spectators for its technical brilliance, spontaneity and dramatic quality. At this stage the dancer performs many Paranas in perfect combination with the drumer's syllables. Here the pure and abstract dance item can be seen at its best. The danseuse moves, glides forwards and back wards, swings, whirls and pirouettes in an ecstatic way, as if possessed. Every fresh Paran is preceded by the initial dance posture of the That. The lightning pirouettes and intricate footwork variations in perfect unison with echoin drum-beats and tinkling ankle-bells present a fascinating spectacle fit to be enjoyed only by the gods. In Paranas the tempo is very fast, the patterns highly intricate and rhythmic, and the control of the feet so great that at times, when desired, the hundreds of ankle- bells produce the sound of one seven or twelve only. The friendly but challenging competition between the danseuse and the percussionist at this stage is extremely thrilling and fantastically brilliant.

As far expressional Kathak is concerned, there is a rich variety in its repertoire. There are a number of compositions best suited for this purpose. In expressional dance the performer combines mime with music and dance, and interprets the song to the accompaniment of soft music of the sarangi or a sitar. The song either in Braj, Hindi or Hindustani may be sacred or secular, devotional or and erotic and in any one of the forms of Dhamar, Thumari, Bhajan, Dadara or Ghazal. The theme is invariably retold in Kathak emotionally, symbolically and yet realistically with the aid of various techniques which include excellent or rhythmic syllables, mime, gaits, gat bhava, impersonation, singing of the text and gestures. These render the expressional dance items of Kathak at once rich, sober, varied, dignified, appealing, flexible dynamic, creative, traditional, and yet ever innovative and spontaneous.

Kathak's unique layakari, intricate footwork, Dizzying pirouettes, the brilliant adayagi (delivery) of Paranas combined with scintillating rhythmic syllables and instrumental music make it a thing of transcendental experience, aesthetic perfection and great inner beauty. The fine combination and blending of the past and the

present, traditional and innovative, divine and mundane, solemn and light-hearted, given to gay abandon, has further embellished and enriched its repertoire. In conclusion, it is one of the classical Indian danceforms destined to live for ever with its various characteristic highlights getting richer and still richer with the passage of time and further deep studies done in its creative and aesthetic aspects.

Kathakali

Kathakali, the traditional story-play of kaleidoscopic Kerala, was evoved and nurtured, not unlike Bharata Natyam, in the temples. It is also called Attakatha (dance-play), and is fundamentally of epic dimensions. Its journey from temples to courts and then to streets and courtyards of Karala tells the story of its ever increasing universal appeal and popularity. Many ancient dances and dramas of Kerala have influenced Kathakali. These include the oldest Mutiettu, Kutiyattam, and later Krishnattam and also Ramanattam. Kathakali or Attakatha marks the culmination of the evolution of various ritualistic, religious, folk and classical dance-drama traditions of Kerala. It incorporates all that is best in various dance forms of the region.

Describing Kathakali's epic dimensions merging into cosmic ones, and its symbolical significance K. Bharatta Iyer says, "The stage represents the world that has come into being in space by the primal act of the Creator. The thick blazing wick of the oil lamp set towards the stage and the thinner one facing the audience symbolise the sun and the moon. Sound is heard in the drumming which first vibrates "*Pralaya, Pralaya dimurdala*" announcing the end of the Great Deluge and coming of the 'New Age', The curtain is rajani or tamas (the darkness that divides). Behind it is a couple of dancers execute an invocative dance called Todayam. They stand for Maya or Sakti. The dancers remain unseen by the spectators, just as these forces work beyond the ken of human perception; their activities represent lila endless play of cosmic forces. There is no background for the stage, for life emerges from the dark, unknown void and there can be no background to the sport of the gods which transcends time and space. In this endless

process of the advent of gods and mythological heroes, there is only an unveiling or falling off the veils that obstruct vision. Therefore, the curtain is not fixed but held by the human agency (two men hold it up) and it falls away the moment reality approaches. The musical prelude with rhythmical drumming and singing symbolises the development of sound into language. Light, life and letters having been manifested, prayers are offered to the gods and the gurus (teachers). The next stage in the structure of the play is Purappad (literally going forth), signifying the grand pageant of life on earth; what follows is the depiction of the world in its various phases and moods".

Kathakali is performed in open air on a roughly 5 metre square stage in a temple compound or a courtyard of someone. The stage is generally covered with coarse mats. A tall and massive brass lamp fed with coconut oil is set in front of the actors at the centre of the stage. This is the only lighting used. The lamp itself as a point of gravitaton, assumes a distinct personality of its own with its two flames sometimes prancing and leaping and now flickering. The lamp has two wicks, the thicker one facing the stage, and the other one facing the spectators. The lamp, the drumming and the large gathering of expectant people create a peculiar milieu proper for such a dance drama. This is the august, austere background against which the story-play of Kathakali commences.

The continuous thundering of the drum called Chenda heralds the performance of Kathakali dance-drama. Chenda is a typical drum which is played on one side only by beating it with two sticks slightly upturned at the ends. Obviously, it is a percussion instrument with a very loud and piercing sound which invites the rasikas to a rich night-long feast of colours, arduous dance, high-pitched music and subtle abhinaya. This clarion call to the 'faithful' as it were, reminds me of a hymn in the Rigveda in which the Drum has been so nobly addressed and rightly glorified:

"Send forth thy voice aloud through earth
and heaven and let the world in all
its breath regard thee;
O Drum, accordant with the gods and

Indra, drive thou afar, yea very far
our foemen.

Thunder out strength and fill us full of vigour:
vigour: yea thunder forth and drive
away all dangers.
Drive hence O War-drum, drive away
misfortune, thou art the first of Indra:
show thy firmness'

This persistent rolling and thundering of the drum not only drives away the evil spirits and foemen, but also calls people of artistic taste and receptive hearts from far and wide to collect there for the enjoyment of such a highly evolved, elaborate and intricate dance-drama as Kathakali. There is also another drum called Madala, relatively softer and relaxed than the Chenda. It is played on both sides simultaneously with hands. Then there are large bronze cymbals. All these three are played is unison to proclaim the performance, which begins after dinner at about nine at night. Then follows the pure Madala, that is, drumming on the Madala alone for performance. It is followed by the appearance of two men holding a rectangular curtain made up of numerous bright and deep coloured silken pieces, richly designed and embroidered. Two dancers perform a devotional dance behind the curtain. the dance is of pure type and is called Todayam. The curtain is lowered half way, showing the two dancers who are of noble class. With the louder drumming, they perform a captivating dance and the curtain is removed to the accompaniment of sounding a concnshell. A song from Gitagovinda is then sung and the two drummers exhibit their skills on their Chanda and Madala. This skilled and captivating drumming is known as Melappadam. This marks the end of the prelude to the dance-drama proper. Throughout the performance the drummers and musicians remain on the stage in the full view of the spectators.

The theme to be enacted and danced may be either from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas or the Vedas. An enchanting tale like that of Uravashi-Pururavas from the Rigveda may be the them of the dance-drama, in which the romance and

love between Pururavas and the celestial nymph Urvashi and their final separation is enacted.

The Kathakali dance-play continues all through the night to the accompaniment of singing, drumming and the playing on the large bronze cymbals. The orchestra unfolds and carries forward the abhinaya and dancing coupled with expansive use of facial vocabulary. The dancers enact every event, portray subtlest of passions with such perfection that the audience is transported to the magic world of myths, legends and fairies. The chariots roll by, horses come stamping and neighing, the Asuras sturt and fret on the stage, rock the atmosphere with their roar, blood-curding, shrieks and wicked laughter, acrobatics are performed and with all this, enacted with great reality, the play moves forward to the climax: And then ensues a mighty struggle betwen the forces of good and evil. Ultimately the righteousness prevails over evil and wickedness, and the Demon is overcome and slain, on many occasions with all the blood bath and entrails of the demon exposed that accompany such a scene. As the play concludes with the approaching dawn, the curtain is reintroduced and the players behind it make their exit almost exhausted but fully satisfied having played and danced their roles with great confidence, composure, poise, aplomb, virtuosity and eclat.

Traditionally young boys perform female roles. This has been there from the earliest recorded period of the beginning of Kathakali, but now girls and women also perform the female roles, nay, in some performances being staged in the big cities even the male roles are performed by the women. This seems to be a revolutionary step of far reaching consequence. And the ladies have performed excellently their male roles, giving appropriate interpretation of the well-known mythological male characters of Kathakali.

The prospective Kathakali dancers and aspirants are caught young. They are initiated ritually in the art at the tender age of 10-12 and made to undergo a rigorous and intensive training and discipline under a skilled guru or teacher. It includes daily massages, oill-baths, exercises and sessions of dance-practice known as Colliattam. They are taught how to play all the different roles and

attain various difficult stances and only then they are allowed to specialize to impersonate a particular character. Such strenous, difficult and strict adherence to the traditional discipline is the demand of the art of Kathakali. Every limb and part of the body eye, brow, chin, hand, foot, thigh, leg, finger and facial muscle has particular and definite exercise leading to a great flexibilty, suppleness and grace of the body and its joints. After a long training of years, a dancer appears in minor rolesat first, and the performance of major roles depends entirely on the mastery he or she has achieved in the art.

Besides Angika, and Vachika abhineya, Aharya plays relatively a far more vital role in Kathakali than in any other Indian dance-form. It relates to the decorative aspects of the dance and includes costume, jewellery and facial make-up. The facial make- up for Kathakali is so typical, elaborate and complex that it takes about four hours to wear and two to take it off. Services of experts are required for this purpose. The dancer lies on his back on the floor while the make-up expert paints his face. The characters in Kathakali are of certain types rather than individuals each of which has a distinct facial make up denoting the qualities of the character. The noble, highborn, virtuous, well-known heroes from the mythology like Rama, Krishna, Dushyanta, Nala, Arjuna, etc. have their faces painted green with blackened eyes, red lips and white chutti, a bridge like beard, made of rice flour and lime. This make-up is known as Pácca (green).

The demoniac evil and arrogant characters like Ravana, the king of Lanka, Kansa, Ashuras, etc. wear red and green paints with white blobs on the tip of the nose and the forehead. This make-up is called Katti. Demoniac characters also wear a pair of large canine teeth protruding out of the corners of their mouth, which further enhances their fierceness.

The third type is of those who wear Tadis (beards), quite distinct from Katti. The beards are red, white or black. The red beard is associated with grotesque, mighty and brutal characters. Such characters also put on furred coats.

Black beard and corresponding black face with streaks of red and

white, denote forest dwellers, hunters and aboriginals. They also have crowns of peacock feathers. The female Ashuras like Surpankha wear deep black on their faces with red on cheek bones and the eyes elongated with black. This make-up is called Kari.

Mindukka is the make up worn by good female characters and the sages, sadhus, brahmins and rishies. It denotes the simplicity, prousness, spirituality, restraint and equipoise. In this golden yellowish and pind colours are used. The male characters wear jatamukta (tuft of hair) as a headgear. The women characters have their eyes and brows weel elongated to lend them more grace, refinement and delicacy.

As far costumes are concerned, they are traditionally gorgeous, spectacular, varied, ostentatious and ornamental. Most male characters wear dark full-sleeved jackets with coloured or white bulging long skirts. Lengths of white cloth thrown over the shoulders are also there. The female characters wear their hair in a knot on the top of the forehead, veiled with a ornamented scarf falling over the back to the waist. They wear tight-fitting red jackets coupled with a white sari covering the lower half of the body.

The ornaments and jewellery include necklaces, bracelets, bangles, gilt breast-plates and bunches of tiny bells strung round the ankles. The headgears are the intergral part of the Kathakali costume. These are heavy, large with a huge decorated orb at the back which lends height, stature and grandeur to the personality of the characters.

Traditionally a Kathakali dancer puts on elaborate and spectachular make-up, it being the most characteristic feature of this dance-form, but there have been some experiments without it. Anada Shivaram and Guru Gopinath have been such two great Kathakali artists as have performed the dance-play without the aid of make up, traditional costume and disguise. They practised and performed Kathakali with a great success and applause of the audience, depending mainly on their unadorned skilled abhinaya. They could communicate and interact with the spectators with the language of the eye and the limbs without the help of make up,

costume and adornment.

The language of the eyes or the *Nayanabhinaya* assumes an exceptional role in this style of dance. Hence in Kathakali the expressive qualities of the eyes have been exploited to the maximum, and it lends Kathakali a new dimension. Kathakali alone among various Indian dance-forms uses the different parts of the eyes—the eyebrows, eyelids, the eyeballs, the iris and the pupil to the highest degree of eye-expression. In this context K. Bharatha has bery appropriately observed, "Emotion and feeling are first reflected in the eyes, the feeling indicated by the eyes is then expressed by the angas. This principle of natya assigns to the eye-expression a supreme role. Watching a Kathakali performance we easily realise that the starting point of all angikahinaya is the eye-expression, and in many instances the actor just 'looks' the pada or song—nokkikanuka, he takes the visual impression of the scene or object referred to, his eyes register his reactions or eflect the *bhava* dominant in the stanza he renders. Then only he begins to interpret the gestures. It may be noted that in this style of dance recital the eyes of all the characters are reddened by the application of mild irritant of a flower so as to give prominence to the eyes. The bright red eyes suit better to various moods of the characters and the colour schemes of different make-ups. The red eyes together with so brilliant and colourful mak-ups head-dresses, gorgeous costumes and jewellery bestow on Kathakali and unearthly and faniastic facet which transform the whole dance-drama into a thing of another world.

Katyayani

Form of the goddess Durga or Parvati. Hindu (Puranic), Parvati, as the ascetic Kali, possessed a black skin. When Siva ridiculed her she cast it off, and it was subsequently filled 'with the combined brillance of the gods' to create Katyayani. Her attendant animal is a lion or tiger.

Kaumari

Mother goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). The *Sakti* of Skanda (Kaumara) whc in later Hinduism became regarded as one of a

group of seven mataras (mothers) of evil intent. Also one of a group of eight astamataras. She embodies lack of envy or, alternatively, delusion. Her animal is a peacock. Attributes: arrow, axe, bell, book, bow, cockerel, lotus, spear, staff and wate-jar,

Kaumudi (*moonlight*)

Goddess of the light of the moon. Hindu, The consort of Candra.

Kesava (*long-haired*)

Minor avatara of Visnu. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). His Sakti is Kirti.

Kesini (*hairy*)

Goddess. Buddhist. An attendant of Arapacana.

Khen-Pa

God. Buddhist [Tibet]. The male counterpart of Khen-Ma, he controls the demons of heaven, affended by a white dog. Attribute: a crystal staff.

Khyung-Gai mGo-Can

Local god. Buddhist [Tibet]. Equating to the Hindu god Garuda.

Kirti (*glory*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epie and Puranic). The *Sakti* of Kesava. Attribute: water-jar.

Kishkindha Kanda

Hanuman and Sugriva

Monkey prince Sugriva, with his few faithful followers lived on Rishyamooka in fear of Vali. When Sugrova saw Rama and Lakshmana roving in the forest, doubts crept into his mind and he grew apprehensive. He thought they were sent by mighty Vali to destroy him. Hanuman then allayed his fears and assured that Vali has no access to the Rishyamooka because of a curse. Thereupon Sugiva said, ''Hanuman, you go to ascertain their motives and whereabouts. ''Hanuman immediately assumed the form of a Brahmin and approached Rama and Lakshmana and said, 'O

lustrous heroes, let me have your introduction. Why are you roaming the forest as asscetics with bows and arrows in your hands? I am Hanuman, the son of Pavana and chief counsellor of Sugriva, the monkey prince. Sugriva lives there on Rishyamooka being driven off from his kingdom by his elder brother Vali. I have come to seek your friendship for Sugriva in this guise of a Brahmin."

The eloquence of Hanuman exceedingly delighted Rama. Thereupon, Lakshmana with Rama's permission told Hanuman the story of their exile and of Sita's abduction from Panchavati by some *Rakshasha*. He said to Hanuman how Rama was keen in seeking Sugriva's help and friendship. Hanuman then assured Lakshmana and said, "Sugriva is lucky to have you here. He will be most pleased to receive you. Sugriva, deprived of his wife and kingdom, will be glad to assist in Sita's search." Hanuman then assumed his original guise of Vanara and returned to Sugriva with both princes. Then in the presence of holy fire Rama and Sugriva with swore friendship to each other.

Rama and Sugriva then were engaged in a heart-to-heart talk. During the curse of this talk Sugriva narrating his tale of ups and downs said to Rama, "My elder brother Vali and I were devoted to each other, but an unfortunate turn of events has made deadly enemies of us. One a *Rakshasha* called Mayavi came to Kishkindhya for his father's revenge and challenged Vali. Vali and I came out and chased him till he entered a deep and long cave. Vali then entered the cave alone ordering me to wait at the entrance. I waited there for a year, then profuse blood flowed out of the cave and the great cries of demons were heard. I went just inside the cave and called my brother repeatedly but there was no reply. I heard the demons of the underworld comming up and was frightened. Being sure of Vali's death and frightened lest victorious demons came out and destroyed Kishkindhya, I blocked the entrance of the cave with a huge rock and returned home."

"Being persuaded by ministers and friends, I occupied the vacant throne. Then one day, Vali appeared before me like a ghost, having conquered the Asuras. Vali accusing me off treason exiled me and

also deprived me of my dear wife Ruma. Since then I have been living here in constant fear and pain. Vali cannot come here because of Rishi Matanga's curse. That's why I feel safe here and live with my counsellors." Thus concluded Sugriva his eventful story and begged Rama to help him restore his wife and kingdom and Rama assured him in no uncertain words.

Sugriva had already known from Hanuman about the kidnapping of Sita by Ravana and Ram's search. Sugriva promising to restore Sita said, "Now, I got to know that it was Janaki, who cried aloud, 'Alas Rama! Alas Lakshmana!' while being carried off by Ravana and dropped her ornaments seeing five of us here."

Then he brought the ornaments and Rama's eyes were filled with tears on seeing them and he cried, "Alas Sita!" He held them to his heart and broke down. Lakshmana also recognised Sita's anklets. Rame then said, "O dear Sugriva where has that demon carried off my darling Sita? Tell me where dwells that wicked Rakshasha so that I may destroy him and all his clan."

"I don't exactly know the sinful Rakshasha abode, but I know every place under the sun and very soon I shall discover Sita's captor destined to die a shameful death. I know what it is to lose the kingdom and then dear wife." Thus consoled and comforted by Sugriva, Rama wiped off his tears and took courage.

Sugriva anxious to regain his kingdom and wife one day took Rama to a place where seven tall palm trees stood. He wanted to test Rama's strength so as to dispel his doubts. Rama knowing that Sugriva needed a demonstration of his prowess took out a powerful and shining arrow and shot it through seven tall palm trees pointed out by Sugriva. Sugriva beside himself with joy became sure of Rama's victory over Vali.

On the following morning, Rama, Lakshmana and Hanuman arrived at Kishikindhaya and hid themselves behind a screen of green trees and creepers. Sugriva then tightened his cloth round his waist and challenged Vali with a roar. It enraged Vali and he rushed out of his palace and a fierce duel ensued. Rama stood behind that screen ready to shoot Vali but finding Vali

indistinguishable from Sugriva, refrained from doing so. In their movements both the brothers looked so alike that Rama could not decide and Sugriva was defeated. Somehow wounded Sugiriva broke from Vali's strong grip and fled for his life to Rishsyamooka. Rama and Lakshmana and Hanuman then rejoined Sugriva and told him the reason why Rama could not shoot his arrow. Both Vali and Sugriva looked so alike that Rama was afraid lest he killed Sugriva himself by mistake. Rame encouraged Sugrva to go again to fight a duel without any fear but to put on some mark of distinction before doing so. Thus encouraged Sugriva once again prepared himself for a fresh duel.

Vali is Slain

Once more, Rama, Lakshmana and Hanuman hid themselves under a screen of trees and creepers at the gates of Kishkindha, and once more Sugriva called for Vali to come out for a duel. Once more Vali startled out of his rest was filled with rage. He instantly sprang out of his bed. Tara, the loving queen of Vali then hugging her husband said, "Oh hero, enough for today. In the morning Sugriva fled, defeated and humiliated. Now he has come once again roaring. There is something wrong, take warning. Rama and Lakshmana, the unconquerable princes of Ayodhya, have come to help Shugriva. I have learnt it from a reliable source. On my Lord, pay heed to my counsel, win Sugriva over by declaring him heir-apparent to the throne."

Vali did not like these words of wisdom being blinded by his doom. He ran of his palsce. Tara parayed with tears in her eyes for Vali's safety in the inner apartment of her palace. They clashed outside the city gates and rained blows, hurled trees on each other but gradually Sugriva got tired and worsted in the fight. Rama seeing Sugriva thus is dire difficulty, fixed a deadly arrow on his bow and struck Vali on the breast and he fell flat on the ground. This time Rama did not feel any difficulty in separating Sugriva from Vali, for the former wore a garland of Naga flowers round his neck as a mark of distinction. Rama came near the fallen and bleeding Vali, who still remained alive because of the gold necklace round his neck. The necklace was a gift from Indra.

Vali accused Rama of causing his death by treachery, while he was engaged in a duel with Sugriva. Vali said, "What harm have I ever caused you? Tell me did I come to combat you? You have committed a sin by killing me, concealing yourself behind the trees. Is it worthy of a prince like you? You have slain me for nothing. Is it to get Sugriva's help to recover Sita? Had you told me I would have restored Sita to you within a day by destroying Ravana." Thus reproaching Rama, Vali lapsed into silence for want of breath and strength. Rama then explained to Vali that to punish a punishable was not a sin at all. Vali deserved punishment for he had abducted his younger brother's wife who ought to be like a daughter to him. Vali was satisfied and begged Rama's forgiveness and then lost his senses.

Learning of her husband's death, Tara came out of the city weeping and wailing with her son Angada. Overshelmed with grief, Tara beat her breast and forehead. Her bitter tears made Sugriva sad. Tara broke forth again and again in tears and lamentations. Hanuman then came forward and tried to console and comfort Tara saying. "We all are as responsible for our actions. We reap what we have sown. Vali has attained Heaven. It is no use shedding tears for him." Then Vali on the verge of death said, "Oh Sugriva! be the king of Kishkindhya and ruld the kingdom. Take special care of young and heroic Angada. Now, you are father unto him." Do your duty towards Rama. Wear this divine gold necklace round your beautiful neck. Angada, my boy! be indifferent to pleasure and pain and serve Sugriva, your master, faithfully." With these words Vali breathed his last.

The famed beauty Tara wept bitterly again and again, and this made Sugriva extremely repentant and sorry. Rama gently approached crying Tara. When Tara saw Rama at close quarters the truth of Rama's incarnation was revealed to her and all her anger evaporated. The soothing words of Rama helped her incontrolling her grief. With due rites and ceremonies Vali was cremated and obsequies were observed. After this Sugriva entered Kishkindhya with Rama's permission and was crowned amidst all the coronation rites and ceremonies. Sugriva then declared young and brave Angada as his heir-apparent as was desired and directed by Rama.

The rainy season had set in and for the next four months no military expedition was possible. Therefore, Rama with Lakshmana repaired to the Prasarvana hills. There on a beautiful hill called Malyavan he with Lakshmana dwelt in a spacious cave. It was beautiful all around but Rama knew no happiness. He pined in sorrow for Sita and broke forth into tears. Lakshmana praising Rama said many a word of encouragement, "After rains let autumn come and oh hero, you will kill Ravana with his family and all the generals under him. Your aim with the help of Sugriva will be achieved very soon."

The Rains

The sky was overcast with thich dark clouds and it rained incessantly. The breeze pregnant with heavy scent of Kutaja, ketki and arjuna flowers was pleasing. The lightning, the flowers and other objects of nature made Rama's separation from Sita, unbearable by their resemblance to Sita's beauty. The roads had become muddy and flooded. People from distant lands had returned home. Peacocks danced in sheer glee upon the green turf covered with pearl-like dew drops. The earth wore a beautiful look that of a maiden dressed in green silk. Bees satiated with drinking the juice of kadamba flowers could not fly fast. The humming of the bees, the croaking of the frogs, the rumbling of the clouds, the loud call of peacocks—all combined into a great orchestral harmony. Rama thought rains will cease soon and Sugriva, the faithful friend, will begin himself the search for Sita. Rama said to himsefl, "It is after great tribulations and trials that Sugriva has been reunited with his wife. I should not enen mention anything about the search. He is good and noble and will never forget my work. Till then let me bide my time and await Sugriva's free time and the onset of autumn."

In Kishkindha Sugriva indulged in plesures unhampered. He enjoyed present prosperity to his heart's content, forgetting Rama's cause and the world outside. He forgot the hard days of his exile or the friendship of Rama. Tara too had adjusted herself to new circumstances forgetting Vali's death. Only Hanuman felt concerned about Rama's cause. He was waiting for an opportunity

to remind Sugriva of his pledge to Rama. When the rains ceased and the sky was cleared of clouds, Hanuman went to his king and said, "O king! you have regained you kingdom and wife with the help of Rama. Now it is time that you redeem your pledge to your friend. O king of vanaras, delay defeats the purpose. The rains have ceased and the search for Sita should immediately begin. Rama of wonderful prowess can conquer the three worlds signle- handed, but he wants you to I have the credit, and so he has been waiting for your help."

thereupon Sugriva ordered Neela to mobilise the Vanara army within fifteen days so as to begin the search.

Rains being over, Rama was filled with grief as he thought of Sita and the agony through which she might have been going. Rama's anxiety for Sita saddened Lakshmana and he said, "O worshipful! Be cheerful and preserve your energy and prowess for accomplishing the task ahead. Nobody can touch Sita, for who can touch a flame?"

"You are right my brother, but I not't see Sugriva and it is time to prepare for the expedition. The rains have stopped, autumn has arrived and here I am pinning for may beloved Sita. Sugriva, pehaps drunk with pleasure of the palace, has forgotten his pledge. Go to Sugriva and remind him of his pledge and tell him if he wants to hear the twang of my mighty bow? His indifference to me makes me anxious. Because of his addiction to pleasure and revelry he has become oblivious of my sufferings. Awaken him from hid stupor and tell him of my displeasure. Ask him to fulfil his promise or I shall be constrained to make him follow his brother Vali."

Burning with anger, Lakshmana came to Kishkindha and sent words about his arrival, but Sugriva dallying with Tara did not heed it. It made Lakshmana beside himself with rage, which alarmed Angada and other monkey chiefs. They went to Sugriva and informed him of Lakshmana's wrath. Sugriva, then somehoe, grasped the seriousness of the situation and sent Tara to pacify Lakshmana before he himself talked with him. Tara welcoming Lakshmana with sweet words led him to Sugriva's presence. Sugriva was too apologetic for delay and begged forgiveness.

Lakshmana returned pacified with Sugriva and the latter explained to Rama the preparations already begun about the search. Rama felt happy and praised Sugriva's sense of friendship. Meanwhile, innumerable monkeys and bears of different sizes and shapes from far and near forests, mountains, hills and shores collected there. They were led by their respective chiefs. Sugriva addressing the monkeys and bears divided them into eight large divisions, appointed the leaders and despatched them in the eight directions for the search.

The Search Begins

Sugriva called the commanders and explained them their tasks before sending them in all the directions. In the south, he sent Neela, Hanuman; Jambavan and Angada. He gave them the details of the places they would search and the manner in which the search was to be conducted. Sugriva said that whoever brought information regarding Sita within a month would be made as rich as he himself was.

In the west, he sent his father-in-law Sushena, with a hundred thousand Vanaras. He instructed the Vanaras to return within a month or they will be punished with death. In the north, he sent Shatavali leading a horde of valiant Vanaras. Vanita, a monkey chief, was sent sent towards the east with an army of monkeys. Thus Sugriva kept on giving exact directions to every party. He explained the valleys, rivers, hills and forests to be tracersed so that he troops might proceed along the right line without losing themselves in the thick forest.

Sugriva relied on Hanuman the most for this difficult task and therefore he called him and said, "O Hanuman, all the quarters are very well-known to you and you are fabled and famed for your speed and prowess like your father, the wind-god. None is like you in intelligence, courage and wisdom. Just devise means to find out Sita without loss of time." Rama too thought that Hanuman would accomplish the difficult task and so gave to Hanuman a jewelled ring with his name inscribed on it, as a token for Sita's confidence.

Hanuman took the ring with bowed nead and joined palms and

went away to accomplish Rama's cause. Others were equally enthusisastic and hopeful to find out Sita and to kill her captor. They filled the sky with their heroic cries.

Rama asked Sugriva how did he came to know all the quarters of the earth so exactly. Rama wanted to know when he had travelled all those places. Thereupon Sugriva said, "My Lord, you know very well how my brother Vali, being highly annoyed with me, pursued me in all the quarters. Whereever I went he followed me like death and I ran away in fear from one place to another. Thus I could see all the quarters of the earth till I came to know of Rishyamooka where Vali could not go because of the sage Matanga's curse."

Hanuman, Angad and Neela along other brave Vanaras searched for Sita in caves, forests and Vindhya hills and reached a desert, devoid of water and vegetation and then further south they met an Asura. The Asura sprang upon them to have a good meal of Vanaras. Vanaras thought that he was none else than Ravana. Angada enraged gave such a powerful blow that the Asura began to vomit blood and fell down dead like a big hill. Thinking that Ravana was killed, the Vanaras searched every nook and corner of the forest for Sita but without any avail. So they pressed forward still farther south combing every possible place. At times they would be drowned in deep despair because of fruitless search. Many weary and long days were thus spent and still there was no trace of Sita.

Monkeys and bears all exhausted, tired and thirsty one day lay in a very hopeless position. They did not know what to do. Then suddenly they saw a number of aquatic birds which flew past them with their wings dripping water. They concluded that there must be water somewhere. They formed a chain by holding one another and than entered a long and dark cave. At the mouth of it stood green trees and a cool, damp breeze issued from it. Indide it was pitch dark and they could see nothing and then they began to tumble down one upon another and fell headlong down a long tunnel hundred leagues long but none was hurt.

Then they saw a river flowing majestically and lovely groves of

fruit flower laden trees. A little farther there was a beautiful city. Its streets were paved with jewels set in gold. The high and white palaces, studded with pearls and other valuable stones, were beautiful like dreams. There they met a great and aged female ascetic resplendent with her divine splendour. The Vanaras trembled with awe before that divine presenee.

Then Hanuman approached her with folded hands and said, "O revered mother! what does thid beautiful but fearful vision mean? Thirsty and tired we entered the cave in search of water and food. O divine lady, who are you? Please be kind to tell us all this."

She returned, "I am Swayamprabha. This is Maya's city. Maya was the architect of Asuras. Now this citly belongs to my friend Hema, an Apsara. At present she has gone to the city of gods. Once Maya incurred the wrath of Indra, who kiied him with his thunderbolt and gave it to Hem. First refresh yourselves by satiating your thirst and hunger and then tell me all about yourselves."

They ate juicy and choicest fruits, drank cool, sweet and elixir-like water and then Hanuman explained to the *Tapasavini* the purpose of their wanderings, and then asked her, "How may we go out?" She replied, "My child! once one enters this cave of Maya, even by mistake, one cannot return alive by his own power, but I shall help you. Close and then cover your eyes and don't look till I ask."

They did as they were told and when they opened their eyes they were on the sea-shore but to their great dismay they found that the spring had began and the time-limit set had been transgressed without any clue about Sita. Angada got up stamping his feet on the ground and said, "Alas Rama's work still remains to be done. We were tricked by illusion of the cave. Sugriva will kill me if I ever returned to Kishkindhya. I shall fast unto death here."

Many monkeys and bears yelled with sorrow and said, "We shall starve to death with you." The General Tara proposed that they should return to the same cave again and live happily there, but Hanuman refected the proposal at once outright. Hanuman wanted that they all return to Kishkindha and confess their failure frankly,

but Angada rejected it and said, "No, no, I don't agree. The king is sure ito punish me with death. He is very cruel by nature. Do you remember how he slew my father? My doom is certain. It is far honourable to starve to death here." With these words, he sank down on the earth deternmined to fast unto death. Other Vanaras than cried grief and decided to follow their *Yuvaraja*. So they all set down facing east and determined to woo death by fasting.

Sampati's Story

Sampati, the brother of fair Jatayu, emerged from his nearby cave and said, "It is after a long time that I have plenty of food before me. I shell eat these monkeys one after the other when they are starved to death of thier own will." Angada heard Sampati and said grieved, "Here is death itself in the form of a vulture. Jatayu was blessed to have died for Rama's cause. We are unfortunate not to have found Sita yet. However, we too shall die for him here."

Having heard these words, Sampati grew anxious and said, "What do you say? Is my brother Jatayu really dead? How did it happen? Why did Rama come to forest and lost his wife? Please tell me all this in detail."

Angada got up and now along with Hanuman and Jambavan approached Sampati, the wingless vulture. They told him of Rama's exile, of how Ravana stole Sita with the help of Maricha and how his younger brother Jatayu was killed by Ravana while trying to stop Ravana from abducting Sita. They also told him how they have been searching for Sita.

"I am Sampati, the elder brother of Jatayu. If I could still fly, I would go to Lanka and slay Ravana for his sins," said Sampati. Hanuman grew curious and asked, "But my dear sir, how do you know Sita is in Lanka?"

"I am old, weak and without wings but still my vision is clear and I can see very far-off things, a hundred leagues afar. We have magic in our eyes. No quarter is unknown to me. I have seen with my own eyes Ravana carrying off a beautiful young damsel. She uttered Rama's name."

"Are you sure Sita is there?" asked Angada.

"Yes, Ravana has taken Sita to Lanka," said Sampati, "an island across the sea, with spacious palaces of gold made by Vishwakarma. Sita is there in the Ashok Park, guarded by fierce *Rakshashis.* I have supernatural power and knowledge and hereby predict Ravana's fall and death. I see Sita from here."

All the Vanaras were exceedingly delighted to know about Sita's whereabouts and requested Sampati to tell them more about himself and Rama's consort Janaki. Then Sampati seeing the monkeys so eager and ready to give up their fast unto death told them, "Long long ago, Jatayu and I were flying together over the forests, hills, stream, lakes, seas and kingdoms. As we flew we went higher and higher till we reached the proximity of the sun and we were struck down by the scorching heat of the sun. I fell lower and lower but shadowing Jatayu with my open wings. Then suddenly I lost my wings and Jatayu and I fell leagues apart from each other. Since then I have been here on these hills without wings and hungry. I have seen Ravana fleeing across the sky with Sita, and he has not left Lanka since then.

"My son has also reported me Sita's abduction by Ravana. The other day he had gone in search for food but returned in the evening without any, and I was dying with hunger. He was waiting over a mountain pass for a prey when there appeared a dark demon carrying a damsel in his lap. As my son prepared to attack the demon, he begged for passage and my son forgiving him allowed to escape. Then he learnt from Siddhas and other sky-rovers that he was Ravana, the king of *Rakshashas* and the damsel was Janaki, Rama's wife. Then I wished I had wings to challenge Ravana but was helpless. Now devise some means to go to Lanka across the sea. Don't delay nor be indifferent to Rama's service."

Vanaras were beside themselves with joy. They jumped about in sheer glee saying, "Now we would not die. We know where Sita is. We shall achieve what we are commanded to do." With this Sampati's trials were over. According to a boon he had received, new feathers sprang on his sides. He was satisfied that like Jatayu he too could do something for Rama. Sampati then performed

watery rites for his dead brother Jatayu.

Actually, Sampati had been waiting for the arrival of these Vanaras, because Rishi Nishakara long ago living here had predicted that with the arrival of Rama's emissaries Sampati will regain his former strenght, vision and wings. And he had been waiting anxiously for this opportunity.

Sampati could not be false. He gave Vanaras the information rearding Sita. She was there in Lanka, hundred leagues across the ocean, in the Ashoka Park and Ravana was her abductor. But this did not satisfy the monkeys. They wanted the first-hand information. At least one of their leaders should have seen Sita with his own eyes. Nothing short of this could satisfy them, so they marched to the sea and stood at the seashore. The mighty sea filled them with wonder. They looked out at the vast expanse of blue water. At one place the water of the sea reflected all the sky and the coastal world, at another agitated by the wind, it rose as high as hills in waves Vanaras stood in awe at the sight of this mighty ocean.

Next day, the monkeys assembled into a council to find out who among them was powerful enough to leap across the sea to Lanka and then jump back. Angada invited such a hero to come forward. In spite of Angada's repeated encouragement the whole assembly stood mute like inanimate obects. None came forward. After a long silence they began to talk about personal leaps. One said he could ten leagues. Another said he could jump twenty. Sharva said, "Thirty are enough for me." "I can cover forty with ease," said Rashba. Sushena said, "I can leap up to eighty." Jambavan then said, "I am old, aged and weak, still I can cover ninty leagues but it will not serve us. Would that I was young!"

Angada then respectfully said, "I shall try myself. I can cross this hundred leagues but I doubt my capacity to return."

"No, you can't," intervened Jambavan, "We know your prowess. You are our commander and it is we who must serve you. You are the root of our venture."

"Then there seems to hope." exclaimed Angada.

"No hope!" said Jambavan and then turning to Hanuman, who was standing beside him cast down, said, "O, chief of the monkey! why are you silent? Your strength is matchless. None is equal to you either in wisdom or intelligence, but it seems you are unaware of your hidden prowess. You are the son of Anjana, a maiden among goddess. She was born as a Vanari under a curse. One day, as she was enjoying herself on the slopes of a mountain, the wind-god saw her beauty and fell headlong in love and then and there embraced her. Infuriated she enquired, "Oh wretch, who are you? How dare you insult me like this?" The wind-god replied, "Be not angry, my beauty! you do not lose your virgin purity at my touch. I have embraced you in my heart's desire and consequently you will bear a child as strong and intelligent as I am."

She delivered you in time a cave. When you were yet a baby, O Hanuman, seeing the rising sun and taking it to be a fruit, you sprang three hundred leagues in the sky to pluck it. Indra, the king of gods, then became concerned with the sun's safety and hurled his thunderbolt at you. Being struck by it you fell down on a mountain and your left jaw was broken. Since then you are known as Hanuman.

"It enraged the wind-god and he stood still and motionless. Gods and all living beings got frightened. They felt breathless and stifled. The gods collected and begged your father's forgiveness. Brahma and Indra blessed you with immortality. No weapon can destroy you. Death cannot touch you unless you yourself so desire. You are mighty and wise like your father. Save our lives by serving Rama's cause. O hero, rise up and leap across the ocean to Lanka."

Being reminded of his parentage and strength, Hanuman assumed a huge form fit to cross the ocean. As we grew in size before monkeys, they praised him in sheer delight and wonderment. Jambavan then again explained, "My son! your are our saviour. We pray to gods to bless you. Our existence depends on your safe return."

Hanuman prepared himself for the great leap. He climbed up the Mahendra mountain to get firm support under his feet. His heavy tread pressed down the rocks and caves. Birds flew away

frightened, snakes entered their holes, Gandharvas and Vidyadharas, drinking with their beloveds, fled in terror. Meanwhile, Hanuman concentrated his mind hard on his mission.

Kollapura-Mahalaksmi

Goddess. Hindu (Puranic). Six-armed. Attibutes: club, shield and wine glass.

Korravai

War goddess. Dravidian (Tamil) [southern India and Sri Lanka]. worshipped in desert regions in southern India, thought to live in trees and equating to Durga. She has a son, Murukan, Also Katukilal; Korrawi.

Kotisri

Mother goddess. Buddhist. The so-called mother of 7,000 *buddhas*'.

Krishna (*the dark one*)

Origin Hindu Epic and Puranic) [India]. Incarnation of Visnu.

Known period of worship circa 300 BC or earlier until present.

Synonyms Kannan (Tamil). Many epithets.

Centere(s) of cult generally throughout India, but particularly Mathura.

Art references sculptures generally bronze but also stone. Reliefs.

Literary sources Mahabharata epic, Bhagavad- Gita and Bhagavata-Purana.

Krsna is the eighth and arguably the most important incarnation or avatara of the god Visnu. He appears inauspiciously in the Vedic texts, but grows in stature and popularity. Allegedly born at Mathura on the bank of the river Yamuna, he is the son of Vasudeva and Devaki, fostered by Nanda and Yasoda. He is deity who epitomizes human aspirations and shortcommings together. Thus he is both a Hindu divine hero, and a drinker and womanizer. He has no legal consort but his chief mistress, a married woman, is Radha. He is reputed to have enjoyed as many as 16,000 such



LORD KRISHNA

liaisons.

Almost certainly, Krsna originated as a fertilty god of herdsmen and vegetation who became syncretized with the hero of the *Mahabarata* eipc. In the *Bhagavata-Purana*, Krisna is also perceived as the embodiment of the cosmos-the vault of heaven is his navel. the stars his chest, the sky his eyes.

Krisna's incarnation was, by tradition, designed to save the world from the demonic king Kansa. He is particularly worshipped as a baby (Balakrisna) and as a youthful shepherd accompanied by Radha. He is seen as a skilled musician often depicted playing the flute at the sound of which nature pauses to listen, storns are calmed, reivers flow calmly and maidens are roused. The legends of Krisna's childhood depict him as a somewhat precocious child who plays tricks and ransacks kitchen jars of butter and curds. The incident with butter has been a popular theme for sculpture. As an adult he champions the struggle with the adversaries of mankind, the nagas, subduing the serpent Kaliya (see also Garuda). He may be seen standing on Garuda. Colour: black or dark blue. Attributes: flute, the hill of Govardhana on one finger, an ornament, prayer whell and shepherd's staff. He may, on occasion, carry other objects.

Krishna, the god who delivered the message of Gita to Arjun, is

worshipped in thousnads of temples throughout India. As a lovable child, as a shrewd diplomat, as a great sage and even as a fearless man of action, Krishna's personality has fascinated for ages not only Indians but also thinkers of other lands.

Krishna's picture is depicted in so many styles, in fact Lord Krishna has probably been the subject of the most numerous masterpieces of art. Sometimes he is shown as a child eating butter-cake, at others he is seen dancing with maidens or playing on flute or advising Arjun in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, so on and so forth.

The story of Krishna should start with the marriage of his parents. He was born in the Yadav clan, a brave and virile people. There was a branch of this clan called Shoora and Vasudev, Krishna's father was their chief. At the same time there was another tribe living adjacently and their chief was King Ugrasen. The first born son of this King was Kans, a villainous character. Elders of the two tribes were anxious to forge an alliance. King Ugrasen's brother named Devak had a beautiful daughter named Devaki, who was married with Vasudev to ensure peace between the two tribes.

Kans was cruel, haughty and wicked. Narad, a sage, predicted that the eighth child of Devaki would slay Kans. Hearing this Kans decided that not only the eighth child but all the children of Devaki should be killed immediately after birth. To implement his diabolical plan, Kans held both Vasudev and Devaki as prisoners in the palace.

This way six of Devaki's sons were killed one by one by Kans. The seventh son of Devaki was saved by her husband's kinsmen, who took away the child immediately on birth in a nearby town named Gokul at the house of his friend, Nand, where Vasudev's elder wife, Rohini, was living.

As the fateful day of the birth of the eighth child drew near, Devaki was full of anxiety. She had been told by a great sage that Lord Vishnu himself was going to appear in this world through her womb. On the other side Kans had also taken extra precautions against the birth of the eighth child. The guards were heavily armed

and many more men were deployed.

As it happened, on the day of Krishn's birth rains pured heavily, storms lashed the streets and there was constant thunder and lightning. At this time Vishnu appeared in a vision to Vasudev and said he was coming and should be taken far away to escape the killers hired by Kans. Miraculously the prison doors opened and the guards at the gate fell asleep. Vasudev carried the newly born Krishna across the river Yamuna to the other bank. In the other town this child too was also brought to the house of Vasudev's friend Nand. He and together with his wife Yashoda welcomed the child in their own household. At the same time to hoodwink Kans another child was brought back by Vasudev to the prison. Kans did not spare the substitute child, though it was a girl and not a boy. In many of the pictures Yashoda is seen Krishna holding in her arms and caressing him while in others she is seen scolding the child Krishna for his mischievous pranks. thousands of songs on the child-like plays of Lord Krishna have been composed and are being sung throughout India. People preserve at home child Krishna's image in stone, brass or other metal and worship it every morning. Continuing the story of his birth, the legend says that when the news of the birth of a son to Nand and Yashoda spread in the town of Gokul a stream of people reached their house. Singing and dancing welcomed the arrival of the new child. Mother Yashoda crooned over her son. She rocked her son in his cradle just as Hindu women through so many centuries have continued to rock Lord Krishna on the day of his birth, called as *Jannashtami*. The customary worship today is done by putting a cucumber in the cradle which represents the birth of infant Krishna.

When Nand got the child's horoscope cast, the learned Brahmins declared that the child was destined to do great deeds and he would destroy so many demons. Thus starts the fascinating tale of the infancy days of Lord Krishna—the stories that describe his baby pranks, his capacity for mischief, the immense affection of his foster-mother, Yashoda, the endless love of the cowgirls for this child and also of his supernatural powers at this age. Time after time Krishna protects the cowherds from harm and defeats the forces of evil. In this way Krishna continues his early life—the life

of a god born amidst the simple village folk.

The first demon challenging the life of Krishna is named Putna. She was a demon who killed small chidlren by feeding them her breast's milk. This demon assumed the form of a beautiful girl and came to Yashoda's house. Enchanted by her fake beauty Yashoda allowed Putna to hold the baby and then to suckle him. Krishna fastened his tiny mouth to her breast and started sucking her very life out with the milk. Putna tried to push the child away but to no avail. This way the demon met her end and Yashoda found the child safe and sound sucking her breast. At the time of her death Putna regained her ugly shape of demon. The second attack on Krishna came from another demon, Saktasur (a demon in the form of a wooden cart). Child Krishna kicked this demon also and killed him.

When Krishna became five months old, he was attacked by Trinavart, the demon of storm and whirlwind. The demon seized child Krishna and whirled him into the air. Yashoda and other cowgirls with men-folk searched the child everywhere. On the other side the child-god forced the demon down on the ground and dashed him to death against a rock. After a while the searching team discovered Krishna playing on the chest of the dead demon. Filled with great joy Yashoda picked the child and hugged him to her bosom.

A sage was called to give names to the two children of Vasudev, brought from Mathura to Gokul—one nurtured by Rohini, the first wife of Vasudev and the other fostered by Yashoda, the wife of Vasudev and the other fostered by Yashoda, the wife of Nand. This sage gave two children the names of Balram and Krishna. Balram was also given six other names but the sage declared that Krishna, being born in Vasudev's house, was to be called Vasudeva though his names were numberless as he was the incarnation of God and had been born to remove the ills of the world. The other child too was a part of Vishnu and was the incarnation of Sheshnag. Thus they learnt about the true character of both the children but preferred to remain silent and continued treating Krishna as their son.

Both the brothers grew up at Gokul. When Krishna started walking he indulged in his naughty pranks: stealthily entering the houses of cowgirls and stealing their cream, curd and butter. Though Krishna was sometimes caught by them yet by his innocent talks he always outwitted them and they went back bursting into laughter. Once Yashoda became very angry and tied him to a mortar. Hearing a loud crash Yashoda came running and found Krishna had dragged the mortar between the trunks of two trees, pulled them down and was quietly sitting between them. As the legend goes two youngmen by the names of Kuber and Nal had been imprisoned in these two trees and Lord Krishna had released them by this action.

By this time Nand and Yashoda left Gokul and had settled in a forest region called Brindaban. Krishna was now five years old. A demon named Vatsasur turnings himself into a cow mingled with the herd. His presence was recognised by Krishna, who seized the demon-cow by the hind legs, whirled it round his head and dashed it to the ground. He was then confronted by another demon, Bakasur, who attacked in the form of a crane. This huge bird opened its peak and engulfed Krishna. The incarnate Lord then tore its beak in two. Krishna was later on attacked by a snake- demon, Ugrasur. It sucked the Lord in its mouth. Krishna expanded his body to such an extent that the snake burst into tiny bits.

At the age of eight Krishna did another amazing feat. Callling his freiends, Krishna readched the river Yamuna. In the river there was a dangerous whirpool, in which lived the giant snake, named Kaliya. The Lord and his cowherds started playing ball. A solitary Kadam tree stood by the bank and Krishna climbed it. One cowherd threw the ball towards Krishna but it fell in the river. Krishna plunged into the river to pull out the ball. Kaliya, the snake, detected that a young boy had entered his domain. It began to spout poisonous substance and encircled Krishna in its coils. Nand and Yashoda with so many others were highly alarmed and came to the bank of the river. Yashoda in agony was just going to jump in the river herself when Krishna came upon the surface of water playing his flute and standing upon the head of Kaliya. He had subdued the mighty snake with his superhuman strength.

Another phase of Krishna's life at this stage is the mad love of cowgirls for this charming boy. As Krishna grew up, he exuded charm and attracted everybody. Even the married cowgirls found his beauty irresistible. Playing on his flute Krishna enchanted these girls. In the later centuries' accounts probably during the tenth and twelfth century, a cowherd girl named Radha came into great prominence as the constant lover and companion of Krshna. She was the daughter of Virhbhanu and was married to Ayaan. This woman fell madly in love with Krishna and became immortal. Now her image can be seen standing side by side with Krishna in most of the temples. In all the stories of Krishna's youth Radha is given the most prominent place and in dances, known as Rass-lila dances. Radha is invariably shown dancing together with Krishna while all other cowgirls are only seen moving in circle around the two. These days this episode is given a philosophical meaning stating that Radha represents the soul while Krishna represents God. Thus Radha's love means yearning of the soul for merger with the Almighty.

Amongst the other exploits of Krishna during those days is one concerning Indra, a very powerful god during early Vedic period but later reduced only as a chief of smaller gods. Jealous of Krishna's fame, Indra being the king of skies, called upon clouds to rain down in torrents at Brindaban. Facing the unbearable downpour from above the cowherds and other people of the region appealed to Krishna for relief. Fully alive to the situation, Krishna calmed their fears and raised the Goverdhan hill overhead with support of his little finger. Indra himself poured torrential rains for seven days but Brajbhumi's people remained dry under the shelter of the Goverdhan hill. Indra was complelled to relent and admitted that in the shape of Krishna Lord Vishnu had himself appeared on the earth. He was pardoned and returned to his kingdom of heavens.

Not withstanding all these pranks, feats and frivolous deeds of Krishna, the real reason for his birth was that of ridding this earth of the vicious tyrant Kans. This king in his search for the child who was destined to kill him slaughtered many children. Krishna too had been subject to so many attacks but he survived each one by

his miraculous powers. One day, however, a sage confided to Kans that his true enemy was alive. Kans in consultation with his councillors hatched aplot to decoy both the brothers, Balram and Krishna, to Mathura. A special festival of armed combats wasproclaimed. It was rightly aniticipated that the two brothers would be coming with other cowherds. When they came the wrestlers of the king would throw them down and kill them. Kans sent for Akrur, the chief of Yadavs and a leading member of his court. He briefed Akrur about his intentions. Akrur was a good man and he agreed to go overjoyed at the thought of meeting the Lord. He reached Brindaban and revealed to Krishna the intentions of Kans. Krishna agreed to accompany him to Mathura together with his brother Balram.

When Krishna and Balram reached Mathura with Akrur, the whole city thronged to have a look at the two brothers, whose reputation had run much in advance to this city of Mathura. The next day Kans had fixed for the commencement of a wrestling match and of other feats of strength.

Arena for the competition was richly decorated and citizens from Mathura and nearby villages had thronged to witness the events. Krishna was denied access by stationing a ferocious elephant at the gate. Krishna killed the beast and entered the area carrying the tusks in his hands. King Kans conveyed to them that hearing the tales of their valour, he wanted to witness their feats of strength.

The two mighty wrestlers of the court, named Chanura and Mushtika were let loose against the two brothers. In the match the two giants were badly defeated and likewise a few other fighters of king Kans were mauled by the brothers.

At this grand show all danced in joy while Kans felt very much afraid in his heart. In rage Kans shouted, "Kill these two sons of Vasudev and their father. Also put to death all who have side with my enemies," Lord Krishna jumped on the dais where Kans was sitting and catching him by the hair, dragged him down. In the battle between the two Kans was killed by him. Then eight younger brothers of Kans attacked Krishna but they were slain by Balram. After this Vasudev and Devaki were released from the prison and

they were filled with joy to meet their victorious sons. Lord Krishna then touched the feet of their foster father and mother, Nand and Yashoda. He said, "You two have done more than real parents could do." He gave them the best of presents and bade farewell. This way ended the first part of Lord Krishna's like.

The second part of life of Krishna appears in the context of great war between Kauravs and Pandavs, the princes of Hastinapur. Pandavs were the first cousin of Krishna. On hearing the news of death of Pandu, the husband of his father's sister Krishna approached Akrur and said to him, "It is learnt that after the death of their father, King Pandu, the five brother, Yudhishtra, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul and Sahdev are living together with their mother, my aunt Kunti, in the palace of king Dhritrashtra of Hastinapur. Please go there and find out about their welfare. I have heard that the blind king Dhritrashtra is under the influence of his sons and is not treating the sons of his brother in a fair manner.

From here onwards the life of Lord Krishna is interwoven with that of the history of Pandavs. Coming to the Mahabharat we find Krishna's life and doings in a different light. The slain king of Mathura, Kans, had married two daughters of Jarasandh, the mighty ruler of Magadh. After the death of Kans, the widowed queens went to Jarasandh and informed him of the tragedy. He took a big army and invaded Mathura. Krishna and Balram with their soldiers came and met their foe. The army of Jarasandh was defeated though his life was spared by Krishna. The whole city welcomed the two brothers with great joy. For the protection of Mathura Krishna thereafter built a strong fortress and walls were erected around the city.

At that time the ruler of Vidarbha was Bhishmak, who had a daughter named Rukmini. This beautiful princess haring the adventurous stories of Krishna had fallen in love with him. The elder brother of Rukmini wanted to marry his sister to Sishupal, the king of Chedi. The princess secretly sent a letter to Krishna through an emissary. In this letter she requested him to come and save her. Krishna also learnt from this emissary the day when the princess was to be married to Shishupal.

On the appointed day the intended bridegroom entered the city with great pomp and show. The poor princess Rukmini was disappointed not to see her rescuer approach there. When she had lost all hopes the emissary stealthily entered Rukmini's apartments and informed her of Krishna's arrival together with his brother, Balram.

In the morning Rukmini, with her escorts, proceeded towards the temple of Ambika for prayers. Krishna on his chariot was waiting on one side. He with a sudden and swift move took her on the chariot by his side and rushed towards Dwarka. The chiefs who had assembled for the wedding gave a hot pursuit but Krishna and Balram together with other Yadav tribe chiefs conferred on them a crushing defeat and they had to retreat.

Lord Krishna entered Dwarka with Rukmini, who was married with him formally there. Though there are legends about sixteen thousand wives of Krishna, Mahabharata speaks of only one other wife, named Satyabhama.

In the epic of Mahabharata Krishna appears first in the Swyamvar (marriage ceremony) of Draupadi, the daughter of king Drupad of the State of Panchal. The stage was set at Panchal for the marriage of princess Draupadi. Royal princes had come from far and near to win the hand of this beautiful girl. It was declared by king Drupad that he would give his daughter in mariage only to that prince who would hit the set target with his arrow. Five Pandav brothers also entered the arena. None could hit the mark while Arjun succeeded in hitting the mark. At this vicoty feat of Arjun, the princes who had assembled their felt humiliated and became ready to give a fight to Arjun and his brothers. Here Krishna intervened and persuaded the assembly not to indulge in any unjust action. He succeeded pacifying the angry contenders. Draupadi was eventually married to all the five brothers, who in the those days were living under the guise of Brahmans.

After Draupadi's marriage, Krishna is seen as taking active part in the marriage of Subhadra, his sister, Arjun loved her and wanted to take her as his wife. Arjun, after consultation with Krishna, carried away Subhadra in his chariot as other family members were

opposed to this alliance.

After sometime Yudhishtra with his four Pandav brothers came out of their disguise and started ruling over their kingdom. But until Jarasandh, the mighty and cruel King of Magadh, was not subdued, the sovereignty of Pandav brothers could not remain unchallenged. Jarasandh had got numerous princes as his captive. Krishna challenged Jarasandh and killed him in the fight. He thus fortified the supremacy of the Pandavas and also relieved people of an oppressive ruler.

Now Yudhishtra arranged for a big Yajna (sacrificial ceremony), in which all the rajas were duly invited. Here the Pandav broters gave the first place of honour to Krishna. This was highly resented by Sishupal, the king of Chedi state. He started abusing Krishna in filthy language. In the fight that ensued Krishna killed Sishupal; according to legends he beheaded Sishupal by throwing his Sudarshan (Divine wheel) at him.

At the success of this sacrificial ceremony, Pandavas' first cousin, Duryodhan, son of Dhritrashtra who was the uncle of Pandav princes; grew jealous. He challenged the Pandav brothers to a game of dice. Shakuni, the maternal uncle of Duryodhan, was the villain of the piece, he was the master in deceitful manouverings. As the game proceeded, Yudhistra became more and more engrossed in it and played heavier and heavier stakes. At each succeeding loss he became desperate and after losing his kingdom he even put his wife Draupadi at stake. When he lost her too the evil winners wanted to dishonour Draupadi, but Krishna intervened and saved dishonour. As per mythological accounts he saved her through his miraculous powers. However as a result of this defeat and as per conditions laid down in one stake, the five Pandav brothers had to leave the kingdom and remain in exild for thirteen years.

Eventually Pandavs after completion of their exile requested for the return of their kingdom. Krishna tried his best to avoid the war by acting as envoy on behalf of Pandavs. Kauravs under Duryodhan refused to budge an inch. In this great war of Mahabharat Krishna acted as the charioteer of Arjun. In fact Krishna had offered both the sides a choice. Each might have the choice of either having him

as an adviser who would not actively engage himself in the battle or of having his army men as fighters in the field. Kauravs chose to have the army while Pandavs opted for Lord Krishna. It was in the capacity as a charioteer of Arjuna, when the Lord Krishna had recited to Arjun the world- famous divine song of Bhagvad Geeta. Preparations for the big war began and allies were sought on all sides. Many battles followed.

The army of Kauravs was commanded in succession by their great-uncle Bhishma, Drona, their military preceptor, Karna, the half-brother of Pandavs and Shalya, the King of Madra. All the warriors fell in succession and at length Bhima and Duryodhan fought in single combat with maces. Duryodhan had his thigh broken and was mortally wounded. At the end of this war there remained alive only five Pandavs. After a reconciliation with Dhritrashtra, the blind father of the Kauravs, Yudhistra was crowned the King. However he was greatly depressed and highly troubled at the loss of all kith and kin. After his coronation the horse-sacrifice ceremony was performed by Yudhishtra. Later on the Pandav brothers too left the kingdom and retired to the Himalayas.

In this context what interests us regarding Lord Krishna is his divine message to Arjun. In Bhagwat Geeta, Krishna points out that to a warrior nothing is nobler than a righteous war and declares that one should do his duty without any attachment for results. He explains to Arjun the three noble paths. First in that of Yoga (knowledge) which means yoking mind and body to achieve perfect unity beyond the limits of thoughts and language; second is that of Dharma (righteousness), which means religious duties and customs, while the third is that of Bhakti (devotion). The last one of devotion implies love to a personal God and complete surrender to Him. This is the path that commands the strongest approval of Krishna. He says "Have your mind in Me, be devoted to Me, to Me shall you come.. Though I am the unborn, the changeless Self... to save the good and destory evil doers, to establish the right, I am born from time to time."

Numerous heroic incidents intervened before the time came for Krishna to leave the human body and return. Legend says that the

gods, headed by Brahma and Shiv approached Krishna begging him to return as the latter's mission on earth had been completed. Krishna promised the gods that within seven nights he would complete the destruction of Yadavs and return to his perennial home . Bad omens started appearing in Dwarka; strong hurricanes, screaming birds wailing cats and dogs, howling jackals and headle spirits drew the attention of all Yadavs in Dwarka. Krishna advised the residents to leave Dwarka and move to Prabhasha, a site further inland. Krishna had now made last preparatons for their annihilation. On the way the Yadavs drank heavily and struck one another with fatal blows. In a short time no Yadav was left alive except mighty Brishan and Daruka, his charioteer. Only those left behind at Dwarka were spared to continue the race of this tribe. Balram, the brother and companion of Krishna, went to the sea shore, performed yoga and left his body returning to his real self, viz., Shehsa Nag, the serpent of eternity. Krishna seated himself by a fig tree and spread his left leg turning the sole of his foot outwards. He was by mistake struck with a poisonous arrow by a hunter and thus prepared himself for the final departure. He instructed Darudka, his charoteer, to go to Dwarka and break the news to the residents. Finally the ocean came up and swallowed the city of Dwarka engulfing everything except the temple.

The entire legend of Krishna's life and his *leelas* (deeds) provide a great opportunity for presentation of events through architecture, poetry, music and dancing. The many fecets of his endearing activities have fired the imagination as no other incarnation has done. He is naughty boy, a romantic lover, a heroic warrior, a shrewd diplomat and a great '*Sanyasi*' (ascetic). He is not only the pivotal character of an epic but also the author of one of the most sacred books of the Hindus-a treasure house of phiolosophy and a fountain of solace to the troubled hearts. It has been said that in Krishna we have the fullest and the most perfect manifestation of the Divine.

Krishna and the Gopis

The story of Krisna's dance with the gopis (cowherd girls) is the most sacred of the Gopals cult's myths and the source of the

principal figures of its symbolic language. The favorite version based on *Bhagavata Purana* 10-29-33 is commonly retold in popular poetic recitations, songs, or operatic performances.

On a certain full-moon night in autumn, Krisna stood at the edge of a forest near the settlements of the cowherds. With a mischievous smile he put his flute to his lips. The flute's enchanting notes carried afar until they reached the houses of the cowherds where the dutiful wives of the herdsmen were preparing food and attending to the needs of their familes. But when they heard the bewitching notes, they were helpless. Beside themselves, they dropped their wifely tasks and hurried into the dusk. At the forest's edge they came upon Krisna. He feigned astonishment and addressed the gopis thus:

Krisna: O ladies, you surprise me. What seovice can I do you?

Gopis: You have called us, and we have come.

Krisna: I was playing the flute merely for my own pleasure. I have not called you. Why have you come here?

Gopis: Why do you ask why we have come? You have called us, and it is to see you that we have come!

Krisna: New you have seen me. It is a dark night, this is a dangerous forest, and it is not a time for ladies to be roaming. Go home now to your husbands.

The gopis protest that Krisna is a rogue for enticing them and then rebuffing them. They hang their heads, falter in their speech, and finally are able to stammer out the real justification for their presence in the forest: "You are our real hushand our only husband, the only husband of the whole hunan race, and it is only You that we wish to serve!"

Krisna is pleased by this declaration and agrees to sport with the gopis. Radha, their leader, joins him in organizing them for dancing. They form a revolving circle. Pleasure and excitement grow as the dance whirls on. The gopis begin to be proud that they are in the company of the Lord of the Universe. Not content to think of themselves as the luckiest women in the world, they begin

to think of themselves as the best and most beautiful women in the world. They demand services of Krisna, saying, "Fasten my earring!" "Comb my hair!," "Carry me!" So, suddenly leaving their midst, Krsna disappears in the forest. Forlorn and humbled, the gopis search for him in the gloom, calling out his name as they wander through the dark glades and asking the trees and vines for hints of where he may have gone. Unable to fund him, they gather in a clearing in the forest and beging to console themselves by telling each other about Krsna's deeds. Peering through the trees, Krisna observes the gopis new humility and devotion, and relents and returns to their circle. Then he begins the magnificent Maharasa, the rasa dance in its most splendio form. Moving into the great circle of the dance, Krsna multiplies his own form until there is a Krisna at every gopi's side. As the partners whirl on, romantic feeling rises to a crescendo with the pace of the music. Every gopi's longing for Krisna is satisfied by his special presence beside her.

This tale of Krisna's meeting with the cowherd women uses the language of romantic love but it refers to aspects of the religous life that are not sexual.

Kriya Yoga and Hatha Yoga

Kriya Yoga is a very advanced form of *Pranayama* taught by yogis in India. One of the greatest exponents of Kriya Yoga in modern times was the late Swami Paramahamsa Yogananda. According to Swami Paramahamsa Yogananda, by practising Kriya Yoga one attains Cosmic consciousness.

Hatha Yoga is a yoga of Asanas or yoga postures practised for radiant health and longevity. In a way by practising Hatha Yoga one can make his/her body conditioned to meditate on God. Asanas or yoga postures help to loosen muscles and joints. They also promote free flow of energy throughout the body. The yoga postures are also good for different internal organs and glands. It has been found that bodily postures can affect mental attitudes and mental attitudes can develop pain or pleasure in the body. By changing the pattern of breathing, one can actually change one's

mental attitudes. Yoga postures are very valuable aids in the development of positive attitudes in man. Relaxation is the most important result of practising Asanas or yoga postures. Asanas should never be done under strenuous conditions. Those who practise Asanas regularly follow very strict moral, ethical and dietary codes. There are several types of Asanas and they should be done only under the direct supervision of a very able teacher.

Some of the most important Asanas practised by yogis throughout the world are as follows:

1. Shirshasana—standing on the had.
2. Sarvangasana—standing on the shoulders.
3. Chakrasana—this is a circular pose of the body.
4. Dhanurasana—body bent like a bow.
5. Halasana—body at a 90-degree angle.
6. Janushirasana—head touching the knee pose.
7. Garudaasana—body twisted like a bird.
8. Padahastasana—body twisted like a jackknife.
9. Sasangasana—body like a here.
10. Sukhasana—sitting in easy pose.
11. Vajrasana—sitting in firm pose.
12. Siddhasana—sitting in perfect pose.
13. Kukkutasana—sitting like a hen.
14. Padmasana—Lotus pose (sitting).
15. Shavasana—lying down like a corpse.

Most yogis sit in Padmasana or Siddhasana when they meditate on God. Some even meditate lying down in Shavasana. There are still a lot more Asanas. All these Asanas are practised after bath, prayers and deep breathing exercises under the guidance of an able teacher.

Krsodari (*thin-waisted*)

Goddess. Hindu. An emaciated form of Camunda, a personification of famine. She stands upon a corpse. Attributes: club, iron rod, skull and trident.

Krttika (s)

Minor goddess (es) of fortune. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Strongly malevolent naksatra (s) consisting of the six stars in the Pleiades constellation who become nurses of the god Skanda. (In Hindu mythology there are only six Pleiades, not the seven recognized in modern astronomy.)

Ksama (*patience*)

Minor goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of the daughters of Daksa. Attribute trident.

Ksantiparamita

Philosophical deity. Buddhist. One of the *paramitas.* Spiritual offspring of Ratnasambhava. Colour: yellow. Attributes: jewelled banner and white lotus.

Ksetrapala

God of passage. Hindu (Puranic). Form of the god Bhairava specifically designated as a guardian deity of doorways. Also regarded as a tutelary deity in Saivite temples. Stands upon a lotus and possesses a number or attributes.

Ksitigarbha (*womb of the earth*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). Known extensively from northern India to China and Japan. One of the group of female boddhisattvas or buddha-designates Colour: yellow or green. Attributes: book, bowl, jewel, staff and water jar. In China she is recognized as an underworld deity, Di-zang. In Japan she becomes a guardian deity of passage, Jizo.

Kubera (*misshapen*)

1. God of riches. Hindu (Vedic, Epic and Puranic). He was originally the head of the *yaksas* spirits of the forests, but by

Puranic times was associated with wealth and productivity. He is also a dikpala guardian of the northern quarter. The son of Pulastya and Idavida, his consorts melude Yaksi, Vasudhara and Vindhi. Indentitied with the city of Alaka. He is depicted as a dwarfish figure riding upon a Brahman or a chariot. Colour: white. Attributes: generally carrying a purse, but occasionally with various other items. Also Kuvera, Kauveri.

2. God of riches. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. One of a group of *dharmapala* with terrible appearance and royal attire. Also a dikpala or guardian of the northern quarter. Colour: yellow Attributes: axe, Banner, club, cup, hook, Ichneumon disgorging jewels, noose, reliquary and occasionally a trident.

Kubjika (*hump-back*)

Goddess of writing. Hindu.

Personification of the thiry-two Tantric syallables.

Kuchipudi

Dance Plus Drama

Another well-known tradition of Indian classical dance-drama in the South is represented by Kuchipudi of Andhra Pradesh. The term Kuchipudi is after the name of a village of the same name in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. There is a very interesting anecdote which relates how this dance-drama based on the fundamental principles and techniques of the classical dance as enunciated in Bharata's Natyashastra came to be known by this nomenclature. It was in 1678 that Nawab of Golkunda, Abul Hasan happened to be there and immensely enjoyed the Kuchipudi performance. He was so delighted by the excellent presentation of the dance-drama that he at once gifted away the village to the performing troupe. And since then it came to be known by this name.

It is from this village of Kuchipudi that the dance-drama spread to neighbouring districts and then finally in recent times to towns and cities of the country. For a pretty long time Juchipudi remained confined to Andhra Pradesh and its temples before it sojourned to

the streets and the public stage. The Devadasis or maids of the gods used to perform this dance-drama in the temples and shrines before the deities. It was ritualistic performance full of religious fervour and devotion, but with the passage of time the institution of Devadasis disintegrated and deteriorated owing to many socio-political strains and stresses. Consequently, a number of Brahman experts of the art collected at Kuchipudi and settled down there with a determination to revive and preserve the dance-drama with all its prestine purity and grandeur, and to hand it down to the successive generation. These Brahmin-artists were dedicated pious souls, well versed in scriptures and other religious lores. Since then Kuchipudi came to be associated with male performers alone. These Brahmin artists of Kuchipudi travelled from village to village and town to town giving performances of Kuchipudi dance-drama based on the tales form the Shiva Purana, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, etc. Dedicated to the cause of propoagating *bhakti* and knowledge through music, mime and dance they came to be known as *Bhagavatahus.*

Such great yogis as Tirthanarayana and his disciple Siddhendra or Siddhappa had earlier encouraged it as a religious exercise and the latter created a dance-drama of great beauty and artistic merit called *Bhama Kalapam*. The theme of the play is Satyabhama's deep and abiding love for Srikrishna and her pangs of suffering in the absence of Krishna when he goes away to Rukmani, his another consort, to break the former's undesirable pride and arrogance. Ever since the composition of *Bhama Kalapam* the role of Satyabhama has been a prized character and many great masters of Kuchipudi of the bygone days are best known for this role alone. Other popular stories of Kuchipudi dance-drama include Rukmani Kalyanam, Usha Pariniyam, Rama Natakam, Prahlad Charitam, etc.

Obviously, the history of Kuchipudi can be traced back far beyond Siddhappa Yogi. His *Bhama Kalapam* or *Parijat Haranam* can be ssaid to be only a superior link in a long chain of tradition of Kuchipudi originating in decades long past his time. For instance, in Palkuriki Somanath's famous work *Panditarakhya* in Telugu, we find vivid description of such dance-dramas then in vogue in the

province. Somanath born at Palkuriki in godavari district was a great scholar and author in Telugu, Kannada the Sanskrit. A contemporary of Kakatiya Prataprudra II (1291-1303), he was a great champion of *Virashaivism* and a staunch Lingayat. It may be noted that this dance-drama was born out of the devotion of those dedicated pious souls who offered their prayers and worship to Shiva through the medium of dance and music. The Lingayat cult, a product of Bhakti Moverment, regarded Shiva as Supreme and worshipped Him only. The cult adopted ecstatic singing and dancing as laudation of the Lord. That is why in the beginning the Kuchipudi dance-dramas had their themes from the Shiva Puranas alone, but latter on under the impact of Vaishnavism they began to use the themes and main numbers from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the other Puranas for their plays. It was owing to these bhaktas and their so deep love for mime, music and dance that this style of classical dance known as Kuchipudi could be preserved and passed on to posterity with all its excellence and prestine glory.

Generated by the Bhakti cult, Kuchipudi has imbibed elements both from Bharata Natyam and folk forms such as Yakshagan. It was nourished and nurtured in the temples in the beginning under royal patronage. the skill of the Andhra craftsmen can be best seen in excellent temple sculptures of dancing *Apsaras*, gods and goddesses coupled with marvellous stone illustrations of musicians playing on various instruments. The pradakshinas, pillars, gopuras, walls, niches, etc. of various temples of Amaravati, Nagarjuanakonda, Badami, to name a few, contain fine sculptures in dancing poses, postures and rhythmic stances, each worthy of separate analysis from dancing and rhythmic movement point of view. As an example of dance-sculptures, they have few equals and nothing superior. The figures of gods and goddesses, men and women and celestial nymphs display various dance movements with a great touch of supple and vigorous realism which inspires awe and wonder.

Kuchipudi, a representation of a fine combination of Natya, Nritta and Nritya, was never a solo affair and required a number of actors. It was presented in the open air on an improvised stage by men and

body who were given a vigorous training in abhinaya, music, dancing and singing. The female roles were played by boys and young men of comely appearance. The sutradhar or the director of the stage played the key role. He was the conductor, dancer, singer, musician, come dian, all rolled into one. The play began with the orchestral music which included Mridanga, Madala and a pair of cymbals, followed by an invocation to a deity and appearance of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god to bless the performance. Then came the dancers offering worshin to the Flagstaff or Flag of Indra. The Sutradhara then announced the theme of the play, introduced the characters in his sing-song voice and appealed the audience to witness the show with attention. This marked the end of the prelude and the beginning of the play proper.

Each character entered the stage dancing and singing the merits of the character he or she was impersonating, which is known as Karuvus. The play progressed at leisurely pace and relaxed tempo punctuated with dances both abstract and expressional. It employed the same stages and techniques of Sabadam, Padam, Jatiswaram, Tillana, etc. of Bharata Natyam, but also contained some very complicated items of original footwork such as tracing out an outline of a lion or an elephant with the feet on the floor, or dancing with the feet on the edges of a circular brass tray or with a water pot delicately and precariously balanced on the head.

The renaissance and revival of Kuchipudi saw it transgress its traditional geographical limits and bounds of Andhra Pradesh. Now-a-days it enjoys a wide national currency and popularity. But today Kuchipudi is considerably a different style of dance form than it originally used to be. In most of the cases it is now a solo performance done by female dancers. The Sutradhara has become a phenomenon of the past and the vachika abhinaya, that is, expressional numbers are sung by the danseues herself instead by the vocalists in the background on the stage as was the traditional practice. The element of devotion to gods has also been bone away with, and it has become purely a secular affair with predominance of sringar or erotic flavour. Besides, the drama component has also been totally reduced. The main expressional number is, as ever, from Jaideva's Ashtapadi, the Ramayana, the Puranas, Tirtha

Narayana's Krishna Lila Tarangini or Tyagaraja's compsitions, but now the dancer combines into herself the roles of the singer who sings the daruvus, the actor who speaks the lines, and the dancer who mimes and dances to interpret the text. Elements not indigenous to the dance-drama such as suclpturesque stances and freezes based on perfect iconographic forms motifs and shapes have also been incorporated into Kuchipudi dance recitals to make it more competitive with other dance forms.

Kuladevata (*family god*)

Generic name of a household god, Hindu. The god is schosen by a family to be their guardian deity and they all assemble at his temple, as and when necessary, for worship. Aso Kulanayaka

Kuladevi

Goddess. Hindu. The female equivalent of a *Kuladevata.*

Kulika (*of good family*)

Snake god. Hindu. One of a group of seven *mahanagas.* Attributes: rosary and water-jar. Three-eyed.

Kulisankusa (*having on axe and a goad*)

Goddess of learning. Jain (India). One of sixteen *vidyadevi* headed by the goddess Sarasvati.

Kulisesvari (*lady of the axe*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). Often depicted with a corpse. Colour: white. Attribute: a staff.

Kumari (*virgin*)

Goddess. Hindu. Generally recognized to be an epithet of Durga. Worshipped at a famous temple on the southernmost tip of India at Cape Comorin. Also known in Nepal, where a small girl provides an earthly incarnation of the goddess.

Kumbha Mela Festival

It is the greatest Hindu pilgrim festival that takes place once in three years. It is a riuerside religious festival rotated between four

places: at Allahabad (on the banks of Ganges, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati), Hardwar (Ganges), Ujjain (Sipra) and Nasik (Godavari). The festival that is held in Allahabad every 12 years is known as Maha Kumbha Mela. Taking a both in those rivers during the Kumbha Mela is considered to be a great spiritual act. Adi Sankaracharya himself had given a lot of importance to this festival and exhorted holy men to meet during the Kumbha Mela for free exchange of views. This Mela attracts lakhs and lakhs of people right form Digambaras (naked Jain saints) to Sannyasis who live high in the Himalayan caves throughout the year. In 1954, at the Kumbha Mela at Allahabad the crowd was estimated at many millions and such was the rush that more than 500 people were killed in a stamede.

Kumbha Mela celebration is a part of mythology. It is said that once upon a time, the Devas (gods of heaven) and Asuras (demons) fought for a Kumbha (pot) ot Amrita (life-giving elixir) that came out during the churning of the milky ocean. Then Vishnu saved the *Amrita* from the demons and gave it to the Devas. During their stay on earth, the Devas rested the pot at four places, thus sanctifying the four sites of Kumbha Mela. That mythological incident started the famous Kumbha Mela.

Kun-Rig (*knowing all*)

God. Buddhist [Tiber]. Four-headed form of vairocana. Attribute: prayer wheel.

Kuntu bXan Po

Head of pantheon. Bon pre-Lamaist) [Tibet]. The chief god in the Bon pantheon, he engendered the world from a handful of mud scraped from the primeval waters and created all living things from an egg.

Kurma (*vatara*)

Incarnation of the god Visnu. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). The second avatara of Visnu. Kurma appears in the form of a tortoise which acts as a pivot for the mountainous churning rod the gods employ to make ambrosia from the primal sea of milk after the

flood. Kurma is depicted with a human torso surmounting a tortoise shell. Visnu is said to have appeared in this form in order to recover some of the possessions lost during the deluge. Attributes: club, conch, lotus and prayer wheel. Also the name for a vehicle of various deities.

Kurukulla

1. Goddess of boats. Hindu. A Tantric deity generally depicted in a boat made of jewels. Also goddess of wine.

2. Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). The Sakti of Amitabha. Usually of terrifying appearance. Attributes: arrow, bow, flower, hook, noose, rosary and trident.

L

Laghusyamala (*lightly dark coloured*)

Minor goddess. Hindu (Puranic). Attributes: lute and wine glass.

Laksmana (*with auspicious marks*)

God. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A half-or younger brother of the god Rama. The son of Dasaratha and Sumitra, his consort is Urmita. He often stands to the left of Rama and may be depicted holding a bow (see also Satrughna). clour: golden. Attributes: bow and ornaments.

Kaksmi

Orgin Hindu (Epic and Puranic) [India]. Consort of Visnu.

Known period of worship circa 300 BC and earlier, through to present times. Synonyns Sri-Laksmi; Sri-Devi; Dharani (earth); see also Sita.

Centre (s) of cult no temples, but revered generally throughout India.

Art references sculptures generally bronze but also stone. Reliefs.

Literary sources Ramayana and Mahabharata epics; Puranic literature.

A major Hindu goddess who originated perhaps as a mother goddess but who now represents wealth and prosperity and epitomizes the later Hindu (Brahmanical) notion of the active female principle or *Sakti* in a male deity. According to the *Ramayana*, she arose from the primal Hindu sea of milk. Identified

as the consort of Visnu from circa 400 AD onwards, she is generally depicted as a beautiful·golden-skinned woman possessing four or more commonly two arms. She stands or rests on a lotus which may be watered by two attendant elephants. Another favoured portrait finds her washing Visnu's feet as he reclines on the thousand-headed serpent Sesha, an action which is said to bring Visnu dreams. She emerges im many guises, changing form as Visnu changes his own incarnations. She is perceived also to emerge as the black- skinned and destructive Kali. Many attributes, but most commonly a lotus.

Laksmi embodies the model Hindu wife, faithful and subservient. She may be depicted on the knee of Visnu's *avatara* Narayana as Laksmi-Narayana. She is reincarnated with each of his other avatars thus beside Rama she becomes Sita, said to have been born from a furrow, and with Krisna she it first Radha, then Rukmini. She is worshipped particularly at the start of the business year in India. In the *Divali* (Feast of Lamps) on the last day of the dark lunar period towards the end of October or early in November, every household lights a lamp in honour of Laksmi. She is also propitated by gambling.

Lakshmi

Goddess Lakshmi in the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses is personified as the goddess of fortune and also as the embodiment of loveliness, grace and charm.

She is depicted seated on a lotus flower though sometimes she is also seen as standing on a lotus. In her pictures gold coins are seen dropping down from the palms of this goddess of prosperity. The story of the birth of goddess presents an interesting reading.

Her emergence in the world is connected with a famous Hindu myth called *Samudramanthan* (churning of the ocean). This relates to the legend how with great efforts the ocean by churning was made to give up all its treasures and benefits to the world. The churining was a colossal affair and only by the efforts of Vishnu could this enterprise be successfully concluded. Vishnu advised gods to make peace with the *danavas* (demons) and the enlist their

co-operation in the venture. In return for his help the demons were to receive a share of the sacred amrit (ambrosia) which would emerge from the ocean and make them also immortal.

The gods chose Mount Mandra as a churning rod around which they coiled the serpent Vasuki to enable them to turn it. The gods held the tail and the demons the head while Vishnu took the shape of a tortoise (the second avatara) to serve as the base for the churning rod, i.e., the mountain of Mandra. As one churns the milk to produce butter out of ti, the following most precious articles were received from the ocean by this process: (1) Surabhi, the cow of abundance which was given to seven lower- status gods; (2) Varuni or Sura, the goddess of wine; (3) The celestial tree, called Parijata, which fulfils every desire, this was planted by god Indra in his garden; (4) Rambha, the apsara (the heavenly dancer), who became the progenitor of all apsaras; (5) Chandra (the moon), which was taken by Shiv and adorned on his head; (6) Dhanwantri, the celestial physician with his vessels containing medicines; (7) a container holding Amrit (ambrosia); (8) Kaustubha, the most precious stone, which came to the lot of Vishnu; (9) Airavat, the winged elephant, which Indra took as his mount; (10) UChchaisravas, the white horse with a black tail which was taken by Bali, the demon; (11) Shankha, the white conch shell, which was taken by Vishnu; (12) Vish (poison)— it was the most effective fiery substance which no one except Shiva could swallow. For the sake of gods and humanity Shiva swallowed this substance. It left a visible blue spot on his throat and for this reason Shiva is also being called as Neel Kanth (the blue throated Lord). Last emerged Lakshmi or Sri, the goddess of wealth and beauty. Sri was taken by Vishnu as his wife. This is how Lakshmi was born and became the consort of Vishnu.

Born seated on the lotus flower, she is also called Padma. She as the most faithful companion of life, has always appeared as Vishnu's partner in every incarnation of his. When Vishnu came on earth as Vaman (the Dwarf). Lakshmi came to earth as a Lotus (Padma or Kamla): when he came here as Parsuram, Lakshmi followed him as his wife Dharni; when Vishnu appeared incarnated as Ram, she came here as Sita; and when Vishnu appeared as

Krishna, Lakshmi came in two shapes, earlier as Radha and later as his wife Rukmini.

Lakshmi has other names like Loka-Mata (World's mother); Chanchala (the fickle fortune); Jaladhi-ja (the oceanborn); and Hari Priya (beloved of Vishnu).

In mythology she, whenever associated with some part of the body of a person signifies different gifts. When she is staying at the feet, she bestows the gift of a house; when on the thigh, she gives wealth; when in the bosom, she gives a lucky child; when in the genitals, a very lucky wife; when on the heart, she gifts the fulfilment of wishes; when around the neck, the result is meeting with loved ones or with some lost relatives; and when in the face, the goddess bestows beauty and grace.

This goddess is sometimes represented with four arms but more often often only with two. She has no temple exclusively set apart for her but always appears only as a consort of Vishnu. Still she is regularly worshipped in every shop and home- specially on the day of Diwali festival she is worshipped alongwith Ganesh in almost all Hindu business houses. Many people indulge in gambling too on that night, apparently to find out how their fortunes shall work in the coming year.

In some pictures goddess Lakshmi is also shown seated with Vishnu on the divine eagle, named Garud holding a snake in its claws. Whatever, the representation, this goddess is invoked to bless the devotee with good things of life and if somebody suffers any loss in business, it is said that the goddess Lakshmi has left his house. Her figure is sometimes depicted on the doors of homes to bring good luck and to drive away evil influences. Interestingly enough bad luck is personified as Alakshmi, the sister of Lakshmi. In Bengal goddess Lakshmi is depicted on enrthen vessels and worshipped on the day just after the Durga Puja. She is also often being worshipped in a basket or a pot used as a corn measure, painted red. This basket or pot is decorate with flowers. As the same is filled with unhusked rice she manifests herself in the shape of seedlings grown in the winnowing basket.

Sometimes this goddess is shown as being one with Lord Vishnu, when then is called Lakshmi Narayan. This conjoined deity denotes that in his supreme state Vishnu is one with his consort, who represents his power and energy.

Last Days of Lord Krishna

After the Mahabharata war, Lord Krishna took queen Gandhari for a tour of the battlefield of Kuruskhetra to see the dead bodies of her 100 sons. After witnessing the horrible scenes, she cursed Lord Krishna "On! Krishna, you are the cause of this war. If you had not participated in it, my children would be still living today. Krishna, you and your family will perish in a similar manner." Hearing the curse of queen Gandhari, Krishna said: Thank you mother, I eagerly look forward to that day. Lord Krishna said so because his own family was becoming a burden to mother earth, due to their evil actions and so warranted extinction.

Lord Krishna went back to his island kingdom, Dwaraka, after the coronation of Yudhishtira, the first of the Pandavas. One day as the great Saptha Rishis (seven ever-living masters) were travelling through Dwaraka, a few of the Yadava youngsters thought of making fun of the great seers. They dressed up a sixteen-year old body as a pregnant girl and they asked the seers when the girl would deliver and what would be the sex of the child. In one voice, the great seers replied: "This girl will deliver a metal club and the whole Yadava community will perish by that club." Saying so, the Saptha Rishis vanished into thin air.

The young Yadavas laughed and laughed not knowing about the impending danger. Whoever heard of a boy delivering a club? After few hours, lo and behold! the boy delivered an ugly black metal club. The frightened youngsters immediately took the club to Ugrasena, one of the top men of Yadava clan. Ugrasena had the club ground into powder and thrown into ocean where it became reed pollen. The pollen came back to the shore and became long knife-like grass. One spear-head piece that remained from the club which was thrown into the sea was devoured by fish. A fisherman by name Jaras happened to catch that fish and when he cut open the fish he was astonished to find a strange metal piece. He presented

that piece to a hunter who made the tip of an arrow out of that.

In the meantime, Lord Krishna knowing everything that has happened, summoned sage Narada, his greatest devotee, and told him that the time has come for all Yadavas including himself to be destroyed to lighten the burden of mother earth.

He said that he himself would be killed and that he would go back to Vaikunta as Lord Vishnu. He said that with the annihilation of Yadavas, he had fully accomplished the purpose of his Avatar. One day the Yadavas held a big celebration on the seashore. Suddenly a feud erupted among them and they started attacking one another with the long knife-like grass.

The fight among the Yadavas became so violent and in a matter of a few hours, all the members of the Yadava clan dropped dead on the seashore. After coming to know about the death of the Yadavas, Balarama, the brother of Lord Krishna, gave up his life by jumping into the sea and giving up life by a special yogic method. Lord Krishna went to the forest and lay down under a tree. At that time, a hunter came along and saw Krishna's toe which he mistook for a rabbit and struck him with his arrow. The all-knowing, all-powerful Lord Krishna started bleeding profusely. The hunter seeing the calamity he has caused, prostrated before Lord Krishna and begged for Krishna's mercy. Krishna smiled and told him that he did absolutely nothing wrong and he (Krishna) was actually obeying the unwritten Karmic Law, for in his last life, he (Krishna) has killed the hunter in a cunning manner, when the hunter was the monkey-king Bali and Lord Krishna was the great Lord Rama. Lord Krishna then asked the hunter to go and inform everyone in Dwaraka that he (Krishna) was leaving his body and Dwaraka would go under water a few hours after his (Krishna's) departure. So saying Lord Krishna left the physical body and went back to Vaikunta as Lord Vishnu.

After Lord Krishna's departure from earthly life, Dwaraka went under the sea. It is said that Lord Vishnu takes the form of Krishna, whenever a devotee worships him with intense faith.

Lasya (*dancing girl*) Mother goddess. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. One

of the group of *astamataras* (moters). She is generally depicted dancing the *lasya* dance. Colour: white. Attribute: a mirror. Also the generic name of a group of four goddesses, including Gita, mala, Nrtya and headed by Lasya.

Laukika-Devatas Generic name for a group of deities. Hindu. Gods known from local folklore as distinct from those of the Vedic texts.

Law of Karma & Reincarnation

Hindus believe in life after death. They also believe in the idea, As *a man sows so shall he reap.* That is the basis of Karmic Law. To put it in modern scientific terms. Hindus believe that *every action has a reaction.* There is no such thing as action without any result. every action, even every thought produces a reaction. Hindus believe that every thought and every action is weighed on the scales of eternal justice. The Law of Karma is one of "cause and Effect". It works in the scientific world as well as in the moral world. These unwritten Karmic laws are universal and we can but obey these lays. These lows act in similar manner in similar circumstances. For instance, whenever you put your hand in fire, you automatically burn your fingers. This happens at all times and at all places, to the newborn as well as to a Physicist who might have done ten or fifteen years of research on fire alone. *Nobody can get away from the claws of Karmic law*, because by nature we all do actions all the time. Even those who sit idle are doing actions with their mind, even though their actions will be fruitless and idiotic. The doctrine of Karma has started since the days of the Rig Veda and it is very well explained in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

According to Hinduism, the body alone dies, the soul never dies. But the path the soul takes is decided upon by the past actions which are popularly known as Karmas.

The actions of the former body do not die with the body. As I said above, past actions are attached to the soul and they decide the path of the soul's travel. So if you are born rich or poor, it is because of your actions in your previous life. If you are born with disease that also is the result of your past actions done in past lives. After death,

the soul carries a heavy load of karmas and seeks an ideal body to be born in again. It you had lived as a rotten individual in your last life, then the soul will take birth in a home where people will be leading rotten lives. If you had lived a pious life, then you will be reborn in an ideal home where both parents will be pious and happy.

According to Hinduism, the soul continues this journey with a heavy load of Karmas from one life to another until it exhausts all Karmas by undergoing pain or pleasure sensations in the body. The different methods of God-realization provide easy ways to put an end to this drama of having pain or pleasure sensations in the body. Then the individual soul which is popularly known as Jivatman will merge with the Absolute soul or infinite power popularly known as Paramatman. This merging process is known as salvation.

According to Hinduism, every thought however insignificant it may be, is counted. Every thought we entertain circles around us. A thought never dies. It may lose its strength in time, but it never dies completely. If you repeatedly think about the same thing, then that thought becomes a Power source. If you repeatedly think that you will get into an accident, then your *wish will be fulfilled.* You will get into an accident. It was your powerful negative thoughts that resulted in an accident. At the same level, if you develop prosperity thoughts in you, then your life will change dramaticlly, even if you are a pauper at present.

Believe me, Jesus Christ spoke volumes when he said: "Love they enemy." (st. luke 6-27). Here he was teaching people the importance of powerful thoughts of love. *The love Christ was speaking of is the love without motive, love that has nothing to do with carnal feelings. It does not even involve touching and kissing. By sending thoughts of love to your enemy, your will become a generator of love.* Most probably your enemy may refuse to accept your thoughts of live. In that case, those powerful thoughts of love will come back to you like a boomerang; you will come back to you like a boomerangl you will become a fortress of love. The thoughts of hatred works exactly in the same manner.

If you hate someone and you harbour that thought again and again you will become an embodiment of hate. In course of time, you will find even your best friend loathing your presence. Knowing the power of vengeful thoughts, Mahatma Gandhi said: "Fight without Malice." *We have the right to fight injustice without hating the personalities or circumstances involved.*

Son, just think, how else can we explain the inequalities around us? *A baby is born in the dry deserts of Ethiopia: another boby is born in the luxury of Buckingham Palace. Both are innocent babies. One suffers from malnutrition and diseases, whereas the other grows up in luxury. What a paradox! Son, tell me now, is there another answer?*

God will never punish us. God has created man near to perfection and has given him the Free will to decide whatever he wants. *God never interferes in man's decisions. There is no such thing as being cursed.* We ourselves make our lives miserable or happy. Even in the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna never tried to influence his disciple Arjuna's free will. Lord Krishna, like an adviser, only discussed with Arjuna (his disciple) the various options he could take in his life. Just think, Christ even allowed his apostles to deny him at the hout of crucifixion. So it is stupid to say things like '*Revenge of God*', etc.

Hindus believe that even God is bound by the law of Karma once he takes human form. For example, when God came down as Lord Krishna, he had to be killed by a hunter because he had killed the hunter in his previous life in a very cunning manner. (In his previous life, when God came down as Lord Rama, he killed the monkey-king Bali by attacking him from the rear.) The Yadavas, the blood-relations of Lord Krishna, were also killed since their collective actions warranted their extinction

Hindus believe that when God came down as Jesus Christ, he took over the Karmas of all his disciples and thousands of devotees around him. Then to fulfil the Law of Karma, he allowed himself to be crucified. The all-knowing, all-powerful Christ could have easily (with one glance) transformed the whole Roman army into his obedient devotees.

Instead he even refused to answer the questions of the Roman Governor Pilate. His statements during the Last Supper showed that he was dictating his own fate by crucifixion. He did not have even an iota of hatred towards judas. Instead he showed compassion and love towards everyone including the Romans who accused him and allowed himself to be abused, tortured and finally crucified. Why? The only answer is that the all-knowing, allpowerful Christ was obeying the Law of Karma, the unwritten law of the Universe.

Lha

Generic term for a deity. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. Also the title for a deity in the old Bon pantheon, equating to the Sanskrit term *deva.*

Lha-Mo (*the goddess*)

Goddess. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. Coming from the old Bon pantheon and equating with the Hindu goddess Sridevi.

Locana (*the eye*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). The *Sakti* of a *dhyanibuddha* (spiritual meditation *buddha*), generally Aksobhya or Vairocana. Colour: blue or white. Attributes: cup, prayer wheel and lotus with one or more staves. Also Buddhalocana.

Lokapala

Gods. Hindu. See Dikpala.

Lokesvara (*lord of the world*)

Generic name for a group of deities. Buddhist. These are thought to be a syncretization of Hindu and Buddhist deities and include such gods as Siva, Visnu and others which have come to be defined as forms of a primeval *buddha* or *dhyanibuddha.* The *lokesvara* are usually represented by a small figure, identified as Adibuddha or Amitabha, which rests on the head of the main statue. Also a group name for the many forms of the Buddhist deity Avalokitesvara.

M

Madhukara (*honey maker*)

God. Buddhist. Derived from a Hindu deity and equating with Kama. He rides in a chariot drawn by parrots. Colour: white. Attributes: arrow, banner, bow and wine glass.

Magha

Minor goddess of fortune. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A benevolent *naksatra*; daughter of Daksa and wife of Candra (Soma).

Mahabala (*very strong*)

God. Buddhist (Mahayana). A fearsome emanation of Amitabha and a dikpala (guardian) of the north-western quarter. Colour: red. Attributes: Jewel, snakes, sword, tiger skin, trident and white fly whisk. Three-headed.

Mahabharata

The Mahabharata, in combination with its sister epic the Ramayana, emobodies the quintessence of our national consciousness, unity and great cultural heritage. These two great works together constitute the biggest single source of Indian poetry, philosophy, drama, fiction, music, sculpture, painting, folklore and other forms of creative expression. Since ancient and hoary past these epics have been read, recited, enacted and told in story forms throughout the length and breadth of India. These were translated from the original Sanskrit in most of Indian languages within a few centuries of their composition. These travelled to distant lands and countries like Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Java, Sumatra, Vietnam, Burma, etc., in the early centuries of the

Christian era.

A work of great genius, like the Mahabharata belongs to the entire humanity, and not only to India and her people. In transcends all sectarian, instiutionalized, religious, regioned and such other boundaries. A follower of any religion or country would not find anything wrong in reading, reciting, listening to enjoying and learning from this great ancient literary and philosophical creation.

The Mahabharata is an all inclusive epic, which deals with all possible human situations. It has been rightly claimed that what is there in the Mahabharata may be found elsewhere, what is not there, is nowhere. It is an excellent book of Destiny, Doom and Dharma, all rolled together in one. It is pregnant with profound philosophical and moral meaning, truth and wisdom. The Bhagvad Gita, the Song Celestial forms an integral part of the epic. It is one of the ancient most books, and the largest literary work ever composed. This drama of great tragic dimensions and human dignity is no doubt the Pancham Veda.

The Mahabharata consists of episodes, stories, dialogues, discourses and sermons. It contains 110,00 couplets or 220,000 lines in 18 Parvas or sections. They are Adi-parva, Sabha-parva, Vanaparva, Virata-parva, Udyoga-parva, Sauptikaparva. Stri-parva, sant-parva, Anusasana-parva, Asvamedhika-parva, Ashrama-parva, Mausala Mahapnasthanika- parva, Swargarohana-parva. Apart from these 18 sections there is a section of poems in the form of an appendix with 16,375 verses which is known as Harivama-parva. So totally there are 19 Parvas even though some saints do not consider the last section as an important Parva. Mahabharata thus is the longest poem in the world... The Bhagavad Gita is a part of the Mahabharata.

It is very difficult to narrate the story of the Mahabharata in a few words. Anyway let me try to narrate it to you in brief. Lord Brahma is born out of the navel of Lord Vishnu. Arti was Brahma's son. Soma was the son of Atri. Buddha was the son of Soma. Pururavas was the son of Soma. Ayus was the son of Pururavas. Yayathi. Dhushyanta. Kuru and Santhanu were born in the lineage of Ayus.

King Santhanu had a son from mother Ganges, known as Gangeya, or Devavrata popularly known as Bhishma. After the birth of Bhishma, mother Ganges separated from King Santhanu. Santhanu on his part fell in love with a woman named Satyavathi (of the fisherman tribe). Sathyavathi's father made Bhishma take a vow of celibacy throughout his life, in return for his daughter's hand in marriage to King Santhanu. From Sathyavathi, King Santhanu had two children namely, Chithnangala and Vichitravirya. They married two daughters of the king of Kasi, namely Ambika and Ambalika. Chitrangada was killed by a Gandharva (celestial being) and Vichitrvirya died of illness. Suddenly the country was left without a ruler. So the Queen Sathyavathi summoned her son sage Veda Vyasa (through sage Parasara) to impregnate both the princesses. Princess Ambika gave birth to Dhritarashtra. Princess Ambalika gave birth to to a son named Pandu. Sage Vyasa also impregnated a servant girl who gave birth to Vidura. Pandu, though the younger prince became the king since his elder brother Dhritarashtra was blind. He married princesses Kunti and Madri and from Kunti he had three sons namely Yudhishtira (also known as Dharmaputra), Bhima and Arjuna. From Madri he had Nakula and Sahadeva. All five children of Pandu were collectively called Pandavas. Dhritarashtra married princess Gandari and had 100 sons and one daughter. The eldest son's name was Duryodhana and the daughter's name was Dussala. King Pandu had an accidental death. So Dhritarashtra was crowned as the king. But he couldn't rule. He was totally under the influence of his eldest son Duryodhana. When the Pandava brothers came to stay in Hastinapura, the capital, Duryodhana tried to annihilate them in many ways. Finally the feud between Kauravas (Duryodhana and his 99 brothers) and Pandavas (five sons of Pandu) finally resulted in a fierce battle known as the Mahabharata war. Lord Krishna sided with the Pandavas in the war. In the war all Kauravas were killed. After the war Yudhishtira became the king. Some years later Lord Krishna along with his clansmen called Yadavas left this world. Immediately after that Yudhishtira and his brothers handed over the kingdom to prince Parikshit, the grandson of Arjuna and left for heaven. This in brief is the great Mahabharata Epic.

Mahabharta Story of the Pandavas

Chitrangada, the elder son of Shantanu and Satyavati died in the battle with the Gandharva King. Then the young Vichitravirya was made King, and Bhishma acted as regent. When Vichitravirya came of age he was married to Ambika and Ambalika, the two princesses of Kashi, but before long he died childless and there was none to continue the line and inherit the kingdom. In desperation Satyavati requested Bhishma to marry one of the widowed queens, but he of the "terrible vow" refused to oblige. Then, Satyavati remembered her premarriage island-born son Vyasa from rishi Prabara.

Rishi Vyasa agreed to oblige his mother by entering into the two widowed queens. He first went to Ambika, but she was so terrified with his repulsive visage that she closed her eyes tight, and consequently gave birth to blind Dhritarashtra. When Vyasa went to Ambalika, she was scared and grew pale in the process. And gave birth to pale complexioned Pandu. Since Dhritarashtra was blind, Bhishma made Pandu the King. In due course of time Dhritarashtra was married to Gandhari, and Pandu to Kunti and Madri. Kunti gave birth to Yudhishthira, Bhima and Arjuna. From Madri were born Nakula and Sahdeva. To Dhritarashtra and Gandhari were born a hundred sons and a daughter, and Duryodhana was the eldest son. When Pandu died, Madri became sati by ascending his funeral pyre. The Kaurava and Pandu princes began to grow up together, but soon the Kaurava princes began to harbour a childish illwill for their cousins.

The Coming of Dronacharya

Kripacharya was the first tutor of the princes. When they became proficient in archery and other arts, some more skilled teacher was needed, and Dronacharya was appointed their teacher. He taught the princes the all kinds of weapons, human and divine, along with his son Asvathama. Drona had determined to make Arjuna the best archer because of his deep devotion to him. One day he put his pupils to a test by placing a clay bird high up a tree, and asked them to come forward one by one with their bows and arrows. Yudhisthira was the first to come but he failed to answer the

question satisfactorily asked by Drona, and so he was asked to step aside. The other princes also fared poorly to answer the question. Arjuna was the last to come. He answered the questions correctly, and so Drona said to Arjuna, "Shoot at the bird", and instantly came down the bird struck by Arjuna's arrow.

The Tournament

When the princes had completed their eduction and training, a royal tournament was held to publicly exhibit the princes' skills and powers. The princes performed wonderful feats; Bhima and Duryodhana gave an excellent performance in the duel of maces, but when this mock fight began to verge on a real one, it was instantly stopped. Arjuna, the best of the archers, gave an excellent performance with bow and arrow. The crowd applauded Arjuna again and again. But Karna performed the same feats with equal perfection and challenged Arjuna to a single combat. Both of them stood ready for the duel, but then it was not allowed, because Karna's royal lineage was not known. Seemingly, Karna was the son of a charioteer Adhiratha.

Duryodhana immediately came forward, and made Karna the king of Anga. And thus a permanent bond of friendship was forged between the two. When Bhima said sarcastically to Karna, "You, a charioteer's son, are not fit even to be killed by Arjuna". Duryodhana felt angry and took away Karna by the hand, and making him sit in the chariot drove away.

In fact, Karna was Kunti's own son, and thus the Pandava's elder brother, but nobody knew this secret. Kunti had a boon. By it she could summon any god to make love with her and obtain a son. When she was a mere girl, and out of curiosity she invoked the Sun-god. She begged Surya's forgiveness, but the boon would not be ineffectual, and so out of this union, a son was born to her wearing a divine armour of gold and resplendent ear-rings. Being unmarried, Kunti was much afraid. She wrapped the baby-so in silk, placed in a wooden box and set it adrift in the Yamuna. The chest containing the child was washed ashore, and then it was picked up by a childless couple, Adhiratha and his wife Radha. They named him Karna and brought up as their own son.

The Lac-Lalace

Yudhisthira being the eldest, was made heir-apparent to the throne. This coupled with the Pandava's popularity and excellence, made the Kauravas all the more jealous. They always invented ways and means to humiliate and destroy their mighty cousins. Duritarashtra, the doting father failed to discipline his sons, rather connived at their scheming. They prepared a mansion of lac and other highly inflammable materials, and invited the Pandavas to live there during a celebration. The Pandavas started for the mansion, but the wise Vidura, their uncle fore-warned the Pandavas of the lurking danger in a language intelligible only to Yudhisthira. But the Pandavas did not want to brecipitate the matter by showing that they knew the plot, however, they were on their guard.

At dead of night the Pandavas with their mother Kunti escaped through a secret tunnel dug out especially for this purpose during their stay in the house. While escaping, Bhima had set the mansion on fire with a flaming torch. It was believed that the Pandavas had died in the fire alive.

The Pandavas Win a Bride

The Pandavas reached Ekachakra and there lived disguised as Brahmans. When they heard about Panchala princess Draupadi's Svayamvara, they set out for Kampilya, the capital of Drupada. When they reached the place of Svayamvara, Duryodhana with Karna was already there. The splendid hall was packed to capacity with princes. who had come to try their luck. Then princess Draupadi was led into the hall. Bejewelled, she looked like a goddess. Then Draupadi's brother Dhristadyumna declared, "Here is a bow and five arrows, and above there the target. One who hits the target with these five arrows wins my sister's hand in marriage". Then he told her sister the lineage of the royal princes assembled there. The princes came one by one, and tried their utmost, but utterly failed. Then came Karna, he bent and strung the bow, took aim and was about to shoot the target, the Pandavas sitting there feared it would be all over in a moment, but then Draupadi said. "I'll not marry a charioteer's son" Karna let the bow slip from his grip and retired to his seat.

Finally, Arjuna disguised as Brahman came forward, strung the bow and fixing the arrows shot the target throught the hole of the revolving contraption. Draupadi put the garland round his neck and there was tremendous applause. Soon Arjuna stood before the door of their huse and shouted, "Mother, see what alms we have brought". "Share it equally among you all five" returned Kunti from inside, and thus, Draupadi became the common wife of all the five brothers. Soon the true identity of the Pandavas was revealed and they lived happily at Drupada's court as son-in-law. The news that they were alive and had won the princess as bride sent shivers down the spines of the Kauravas. The Pandavas were invited to Hastinapur, but Duryodhana was very sour.

Indraprastha

Dhritarashtra welcomed the Pandavas, and in order to pacify them divided the kingdom into two halves, and gave one to the Pandavas. The Pandavas built their magnificent capital called Indraprastha on the banks of the river Yamuna. They had Krishna, Vidura and Drupada as their sincere friends and advisers. One day Narada visited the Pandavas and advised Yudhisthira that there should be no dissension among five brothers on account of the common wife Draupadi. To be on their guard, they decided that anyone of them who saw a brother making love to Draupadi would be self-exiled for 12 years and lead a celibate life.

One day due to some urgency Arjuna had to enter the hall to fetch his weapons, when Yudhisthira and Draupadi were enjoying the privacy. So, Arjuna went into self-exile in spite of Yudhisthira's sincere protests. During the exile he travelled through many lands, and finally came to Dwarka, where Krishna, Arjuna's cousin dwelt. There Arjuna married Subhadra with the help of Krishna and then eloped with her to Indraprastha. Later the marriage was duly solemnized. The Pandavas were very happy and well established. Kunti thought gone were the days of suffering and hardship. Draupadi by then had been blessed with five sons, and Subhadra with one, the illustrious Abhimanyu. But it proved like a lull before the storm.

Shishupala Slain

The Pandavas grew mightier with the passage of time and decided to perform the Rajasuya Sacrifice at the advice of rishi Narad. Before beginning the ceremonial sacrifice, they slew the tyrant Jarasandha of Magadha, who had held many princes as prisoners for sacrifice. The great Sacrifice of Rajasuya then began attended by all the kings, rishis, noblemen and others of the land. The coronation ceremony being over, the time to honour the invited guests came, and Krishna was given precedence all over others. But the king of Chedi, Shishupala, a powerful king, objected to it saying that Krishna was a mere cowherd. Shishupala raved in delirium, but Krishna remained cool, collected and smiling as ever. But then Krishna's patience was exhausted. Krishna challenged Shishupala, and a terrible combat began. All the kings stood immobilized at this unexpected turn of events. Krishna took his Sudarshana Chakra (discus), and addressing the august assembly said, "Enough of this nonsense, no more. I am sorry that such an unpleasantness has been created on such a auspicious occasion." Then Krishna chopped off in a flash the head of raving Shishupala's dead body, made obeisance to Krishna and merged into Krishna. The ceremony being over the princes left for their respecitve homes.

The Fated Dice and the Stakes

Duryodhana returned from Indraprastha, but his envy of the Pandavas became an obsession. With his vile uncle Shakuni, he started scheming and they together plotted the ruin of the Pandavas. To deprive the Pandavas of their kingdom and wealth, Shakuni proposed to challenge Yudhisthira in a game of dice, and the latter had a weakness for the game. The Pandavas were invited to Hastinapur and given a very warm welcome. Shakuni then challenged Yudhisthira to play the game and the latter had to accept it. Shakuni played and Duryodhana provided with the stakes.

The game began in the presence of the august assembly, which included Dhritrashtra, Vidura, Drona and Bhishma. A great excitement prevailed and pearls, jewels, gold, chariots, horses and a

lot of wealth was staked, but every time the wicked Shakuni won. Yudhisthira lost all his wealth, kingdom and even his brothers.

Then Shakuni sneered and said, "There is still left Draupadi, the brightest jewel". Yudhisthira put Draupadi on the stake. Shakuni took his turn and exclaimed, "I have won".

The entire assembly was stunned and shocked. Vidura sat with his head between his palms. Bhishma gazed vacantly. The jubilant Duryodhana ordered Draupadi to be fetched there. Vidura asked Duryodhana to see reason and not to do any such foolish thing, but Duryodhana remained adamant. He sent Dushasana to fetch Draupadi. He approached Draupadi and spoke insolently. Draupadi was scared and ran trembling to the inner quarters, Dushasana chased and brought her dragging to the hall, while Draupadi cried, "Leave me, I am in period, and in a single cloth". But vile Dushasana roughed here saying, "You are now our slave; your husband has lost you in wager. In period, or in single cloth, how does it matter now."

The Pandavas and all the elders looked on helplessly. Draupadi stood outraged and trembling. Dushasana tried to strip her. She looked here and there for help in vain, and then she closed her eyes in prayer. Dushasana went on pulling her clothes and they came off easily, but they had no end, they were getting endless and he had to give up his shameless act.

In her dire distress Draupadi had turned her mind to God, the Lord, protector and the last refuge of destitutes, had her honour was saved in a miraculous way. Meanwhile, the sinful Duryodhana uncovered his left thigh and showed it to Draupadi, and Bhima vowed. "That is the thigh I will break with my mace. I vow it, if I do not, let perdition be my fate." The were many evil omens seen, and it frightened the blind Dhritrashtra, and he freed the Pandavas and returned to them their kingdom. The Pandavas rode their chariot and departed for Indraprastha in peace.

It mightily displeased Duryodhana, and he insisted on one more game of dice. Dhritrashtra had to agree, and the Pandavas were summoned back when they were on their way to Indraprastha. This

time the loser had to go into exile for twelve years, and had to pass the thirteenth incognito. And if discovered during the last year, he had to return to the forest again for twelve years, and again had to pass the thirteen in disguise. It was a strange wager indeed.

Oonce again they sat down to play, the bet was explained and agreed upon. Once again the dice was cast, and once more Yudhisthira lost and Duryodhana won. The Pandavas had to go to the the forest in exile as ascetics for twelve years.

Then, Narada appeared and predicted, "Fourteen years from now the Kauravas will be annihilated as a result of their sins committed by Duryodhana and his associates". It filled Dhritrashtra and Duryodhana's hearts with terror.

The Pandavas in Exile

The Pandavas walked fast, crossed the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, and reached the Kamyaka forest. Learning of their exile, king Drupada came running to see them, and so came Krishna. Draupadi narrated in sobbes how she was outraged and molested in the assembly. Krishana comforted and told her, "Draupadi, your tears will be suitably avenged, and then the ladies of Kuru will wail and weep even as you are doing now Take my word." Dhrishtadyumna, Draupadi's brother also vowed to avenge all the wrongs done to the Pandavas. The Pandavas travelled across many lands contemplating how to avenge the wrongs upon the wicked Kauravas.

Meanwhile, Arjuna practised severe penance in the Himalayas and obtained many celestial weapons from Lord Shiva. Yudhisthira laong with Draupadi and three younger brothers travelled throughut the length and breadth of the country, made pilgrimage and earned religious and spiritual merits. During their exile, the Pandavas led an adventurous life and performed many heroic and wonderful feats. Thus, they spent the twelve years of their exile. When the thirteenth year, which they had to spend incognito, approached, they set out for Matsya, the kingdom of god king Virata. The Pandavas disguised themselves into different persons. Yudhisthira became Kanka, the companion of the king in the game of dice.

Bhima the king's cook, Arjuna a eunuch to serve the royal ladies, Nakula the keeper of the royal horses, and Sahadeva the keeper of the cows and the bulls. Draupadi chose the role of the personal serving maid of the queen Sudeshana.

Soon the last year of their exile, the thirteenth year of incognito living was over, and their true identities were revealed. The king of Virata offered his daughter Uttara to Abhimanyu for the Pandavas had protected his kingdom from a fierce attack of the Kauravas. The wedding celebrations being over, the question of restoring the kingodom of Indraprastha to the Pandavas was debated upon. Krishna, Balram, Satyaki and Drupada were the chief speakers. It was decided that the issue be settled by peaceful and honourable means, but if it failed war was to be resorted.

The War Preparations

Drupada sent an envoy to Dhritrashtra on behalf of the Pandavas to the Kauravas agree to render the kingdom back to the Pandavas. But the willful Duryodhana did not agree to return the kingdom. Krishna visited Hastinapur to settle the matter amicably, but again Duryodhana refused to see reason and make peace with his cousins. Krishna said, "Duryodhana, if you do not return to your cousins their kingdom, give them at least five villages and they will be contented". The evil Duryodhana remained adamant and returned, "They will not have even as much as the needle-point of the land," and beside rage he left the hall. With him went out Karna, Shakuni and Dushasana.

Krishna failed in his peace mission and the war became inevitable. Krishna met Karna is a secluded place and revealed him his birth and parentage. He appealed Karna to accept Kunti his mother and the Pandavas as his younger brothers. But Karna remained steadfast like a rock in his loyalty to his dear friend Duryodhana. Neither fear of death, nor the temptation of crown; however strong, could swerve him from his path of duty and righteousness. Krishna embraced Karna, pressed his hand in affection and went away.

It made Kunti most unhappy. She went alone to see his eldest son Karna on the banks of the Ganga, where Karna practised tapas

everyday in the morning. She appealed to Karna to be united with his younger brothers, but he refused to be untrue to his salt, however, he granted a boon to Kunti and promised to spare the lives of four of the Pandavas, except that of Arjuna. Kunti wept and sobbed and then they parted.

The hectic war preparations began and soon reached their heights. Kings and princes began to assemble with their armies. Many of them had comon blood relations with the Kauravas and the Pandavas, and it became difficult for them to decide in favour of the either. Krishna had already decided in favour of the Pandavas, but Balarama remained neutral. The armies began to pour in the famous plains of Kurukshetra. Tents were being erected, chariots rumbled, elephants trumpted, horses neighed, conches blew, soldiers shouted slapping their armpits and the sky rent with the great pandemonium. Both the armies stood facing each other, and looked like two agitated seas at the time of Dissolution. Bhishma led the Kaurava army , but on the condition that he would destoy the Pandava army, but not the Pandavas, and that either he or Karna would fight, not the both together.

Cut to the quick, Karna refused to fight till Bhishma was there. The battle was about to begin when Arjuna, overwhelmed with pity and sorrow, dropped his bow Gandiva and arrows, and slumped down on his seat in the chariot. Krishna then enlightend Arjuna with that transcendental knowledge known as "Bhagavad Gita", underlining the fact the one's duty or dharma is of the supreme importance. At last Arjuna's delusion disappeared by Krishna's grace, and he took up Gandiva and was ready to fight.

The Battle Begins

The battle began with a great tumult rending the air. Arrows sped in all directions like shooting stars. Bhishma was the supreme commander of the Kaurava forces. He penetrated the Pandava defences and carried doom and destruction with him. Abhimanyu rallied the Pandava forces, helped by Bhima, Virata and others. Uttara clashed with great Salya but was slain by the latter. The initial defeat and setback made the Pandava generals wiser, and on the second day Dhrishtadyumna arrayed the forces with great care.

Arjuna engaged Bhishma in a fierce battle. The fight was well and equally balanced. At another place Drona and Drupada fought a fierce duel.

Day after day passed by, and it was the ninth day of the battle. Bhima, in his full fury, mowed down the enemy. His son Ghatotkacha defeated and disgraced Duryodhana. The enemy forces ran pell-mell before Bhishma's attack and the Pandava host was once again completely demoralised. Bhishma appeared like the god of Death itself in his blazing armour, and it became clear that as long Bhishma was there. the Pandavas themselves would not be victorious. On the tenth day Krishna urged Arjuna to kill Bhishma at the very first opportunity. Bhishma began his work of devastation. Then came Arjuna, keeping Shikhandin before him as protection. Arjuna shot deadly arrows from behind Shikhandin, and Bhishma stood silent and smiling. Finally Bhishma fell downpierced and bristled with hundreds of arrow, and the battle stopped for the day.

Shikhandin was a girly by birth, but later changed into a man by virtue of a boon granted in the previous birth. Therefore, Bhishma would not shoot at Shikhandin, he being a woman by birth. Arjuna took advantage of it. and shelterin behind Shikhandin, fatally wounded Bhishma. Prierced all over by Arjuna's sharp darts. Bhishma fell down. but his body touched not the ground.

The Great Drona After Bhishma's fall. Drona was made the commander of the Kaurava forces. It was the eleventh day of the great battle. The battle resumed and the combats began. Drona's sharp arrows cleaved apart the enemy defences. Drona wanted to take Yudhisthira a captive. but Arjuna's fierce fight made Drona beat a retreat. The second day of Drona's leadership dawned and the battle began anew. On the third day's battle Abhimanyu was the hero. It was be who successfully penetrated the Chakravyuha formation of the enemy forces. and died fighting fiercely single handed the combined attack of Karna, Shakuni, Salya, Aswathama and others. The next day. Arjuna consumed with the thought of avenging Abhimanyu. cut his way throught the thick enemy formations and killed Jayadratha. The war went on. and so the

holocaust continued, even through the night. Drona consumed the enemy like conflagration. But then the Pandavas managed to slay him by telling a lie that his son Aswathama had been killed. Bhima killed an elephant of the same name and then declared Ashwathama was killed. When Drona asked Yudhisthira, "Is my son Aswathama truly slain!" Yudhisthira replied, "Yes, Aswathama is dead" and softly addes, "the elephant". The latter words were completely drowned in the clamour and not heard by Drona.

Hearing of his son's death, Drona lost interest in the fight. He dropped his weapons and sat down in meditation. They Dhrishtadyumna rushed and cut off his head.

Karna Commands the Host

Fifteen days of war had gone by, and on the sexteenth day, after Drona's death, the Kaurvas anointed Karna their commander, the third in succession. The armies clashed again and single combats and duels resumed. Before the fire of the Karna's fiery attack the enemy forces meltled, and dared not to withstand him. The fight continued well past sunset, but then the cease was announced.

On the second day of his command, Radheya came determined to defeat the Pandavas once for all. Yudhisthira challenged Karna and a terrible battle ensued. Finally, Karna made Yudhisthira defenceless with his furious attacks, but spared his life. Karna pressed forward and soon stood in front of Arjuna's car. The fierce duel began, which was well balanced and equally matched. Suddenly the left wheel of Karna's chariot got stuck in the bloody mud, Karna jumped down and bent to lift up the wheel. But then Arjuna shot a fatal arrow and severed defenceless Karna's head from his body.

Karna's death plunged Duryodhana in an ocean of abysmal sorrow. He saw despair and destruction all around. He consulted his remaining friends and heroes and made Salya, the king of Madra, their commander. Salya arranged his handful of forces into a clever battle formation and the eighteenth day of the great battle began with fierce fighting. Salya wrought havoc with his boundless

might. It made Yudhisthira angry. He could not any longer tolerate the wholesale massacre of his forces. He fought like the god of Death himself, and slew Salya with a terrible dart. Thus, the great war was almost over. Duryodhana, wounded and weeping, fled, and hid himself under the water of a lake. He solidified the water and lay down hidden from the view. But soon he was discovered by the Pandavas. A terrible mace duel was fought between Duryodhana and Bhima, but finally Bhima broke Duryodhana's thighs with a couple of mighty strokes, and he fell down fatally wounded and died later. The Pandavas shouted for joy, and in victory.

Now, the Pandavas were sovereigns. The coronation of Yudhisthira was duly solemnized, and he ruled over the vast kingdom, but he was not happy at all. The Pandavas performed the great Horse-sacrifice. Soon after the sacrifice Krishna and Balrama passed away. Their passing away was the greatest blow to the Pandavas. Life had lost its meaning to them. They knew their time of departure had come. They crowned their grandson Parikshita and set out on their last and great pilgrimage to the Himalayas.

Mahabja

Snake god. Hindu (Purnic). One of a grouna [seven mahanagas).

Mahacinatara (*Tara of Tibet*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana) and Lamaist [Tibet]. An emanation of Aksobhya and, in Lamaism, a fearsome form of the Vajrayana goddess, Ekajata, who may be depicted with up to twelve heads and twenty-four hands. She stands upon a corpse. Attributes: arrow, axe, blue lotus, bow, cup, image of Aksobhy on crown, knife, skull, snake, staff, sword, tiger skin and trident. Three- eyed.

Mahadeva (*mighty god*).

God. Hindu (Puranic). An important epithet of Siva with three heads (two male, one female) signifying the three aspeats—Aghora (right), Saumya (centre) and Sakti (left). Attributes: aex, bell, hook, mirror, noose, staff, sword, tree and trident. Also identified as a manifestation of Siva and one of the *Ekadasarudras* (eleven forms

of Rudra). In northern India amongst tribes including the Gonds, the expression Mahadeo (great god) is directed towards Siva as the supreme deity.

Maha-Ganapati

Elephant god. Hindu (Puranic). This form of the god Ganesha possesses ten arms instead of the more normal four and may have a goddess, Buddhi or Siddi, seated on the knee.

Mahakala (*the great death*)

1. God. Hindu (Puranic). A violent aspect of Siva. His Sakti is Mahakali. Rides upon a lion. Colour: black. Attributes: five arrows, axe, Brahma-egg, club, cup, rosary of skulls, staff and trident. Three eyed. Also considered to be a form of the god Bhairava in which context he is a guardian of the faith.

2. Guardian god of tents and science. Buddhist-Lamaist (Tibet). Derived from the Hindu god Siva and an emanation of the five *dhyanibuddhas.* Also one of a group *of dharmapalas* with terrible appearance and roryal attire. A deity of rivhes. He treads on the god Vinayaka, or on a man, a corpse, or on two elephant-headed men. Colour; black, blue or white. Attributes: mainly elephant skin, prayer wheel and trident, but may hold various other objects.

Mahakali

1. Goddess of learning. Jain [India]. One of sixteen *vidyadevi* headed by the goddess Sarasvati.

2. Form of the goddess Kali. Hindu. Also a Sakti of Mahakala. Attributes: conch, cup, head dress, hook, knife, noose, rosary of skulls, staff, sword. water-jar and wheel.

Mahakapi (*great ape*)

God. Buddhist. Epithet of the Buddha in a previous incarnation. appearing as ape.

Mahamanasika (*great-minded*)

Goddess of learning. Jain [India]. One of sixteen Vidyadevi headed by the goddess Sarasvati.

Mahamantranusarini (*following the great sacred text*)

Guardian goddess. Buddhist. One of a group of five *maharaksas* (protectresses) who are thought to be personifications of amulets or *mantras.* Also an emanation of the *dhyanibuddha* Ratnasambhava, alternatively of Aksobhya. She is a guardian of the west, south and estern quarters according to separate traditions, Colour: blue, black, green, white or red. Attributes: most commonly noose and staff. From four to twelve arms; may be three-headed.

Mahamatara

Group of goddesses. Hindu. Personifications of the *Sakti* of the god Siva.

Mahamayuri (*great daughter of the peacodk*)

Goddess. Buddhist (*Mahayana*). An extremely popular deity and an emanation of Amoghasiddhi. A female *bodhisattva* or *buddha*-designate. Also one of a group of five maharaksas (protectresses) who are thought to be personifications of amulets or *mantras.* Colour: green, red or yellow. Attributes: alms bowl, arrow, banner, bow, fly whisk, image of Amoghasiddhi on crown, jewel, mendicant, peacock feather, prayer wheel, sword and water jar. Three-eyed and may occasionally appear three-or four-headed.

Mahanaga

Snake god. Hindu. A group of seven deities identical with a group of seven *nagadevas.*

Mahapadma (*great lotus*)

Snake god. Hindu. Attributes: rosary and water-jar. Three-eyed.

Mahaparinirvanamurti

God. Buddhist. depiction of the Buddha lying in nirvana (paradise).

Mahaprabhu

Tutelary god. Orissa [India]. The local supreme deity of the Bondo tribe.

Mahapratisara (*great protectress*)

Guardian goddess. Buddhist. One of a group of five *maharaksas* (protectresses) who are thought to be personitications of amulets or *mantras.* A guardian of the central or southern direction. Also an emanation of the *dhyanibuddha Ratnasambhava.* Colour: yellow. Attributes: arrow, axe, banner, bow, conch, image of Ratnasambhava on crown, jewel, noose, parasol, prayer wheel, reliquary, sword, staff and trident. Three-headed and three-eyed.

Mahapratyangira (*great goddess whose speech is directed westwards*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An emanation of the *dhvanibuddha* Aksohya. Colour: blue. Attributes: hook, image of Aksohya on crown, noose, red lotus, sword and trident.

Maharaksa (*great protectress*)

Group of guardian goddesses. Buddhist. Personifications of amulets or mantras. Common attribute: a parasol.

Maharatri (*the great night*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Associated with Kali and Kamala.

Mahasahaspramardani (*the thousand-fold destroyer*)

Goddess. Buddifist. An emanation of Vairocana, and one of the *maharaksas.* Colour: white. Attributes: particularly noose, prayer wheel and sword, but also depicted with other objects including image of Vairocana on crown. May be four-headed.

Maha-Sarasvatu

1. Goddess. Hindu (Puranic). An emanation of Laksmi. Attributes: book. hook, lute and rosary.

2. Goddess. Buddhist. A variety of Sarasvati. Depicted upon a lotus. Colour: white. Attributes: garland of pearls and white lotus.

Mahasitavati (*great cold one*)

Guardian goddess. Buddhist. One of a group of five *maharaksas* (protectresses) who are thought to be personifications of amulets or

mantras. Also an emanation of the *dhyanibuddha* Amitabha (or sometimes Ratnasambhava). A guardian of the north or west quarter. Colour: red, yellow or green. Attributes: arrow, exe, banner, book, bow, bowl, image of Amitaha on the crown, lotus, noose, peacock feather, staff, sword and trident. Three-eyed and may be three-headed.

Mahasri-Tara (*of great beauty*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An emanation of Amogasiddhi. Depicted seated upon a moon. Colour: green, Attributes: image of Amogasiddhi and lotuses.

Mahasthama (*prapta*) (*he who has attained great power*)

God. Buddhist (Mahayana). A *dhyanibodhisattva* who personifies great wisdom. Colour; white or yellow.

Attributes: lotus, six lotuses and sword. (May have no attributes present.)

Mahavidya

Collective name of a group of goddesses. Buddhist (Mahayana). Ten personifications of Sakti as the femaleness of Siva, associated with the possession of knowledge.

Mahayasa (*most glorious*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An attendant of Buddhakapala.

Mahesvari

Mother goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A *Sakti* who in later Hinduism became one of a group of seven *mataras* regarded as of evil intent. Also one of eight *astamataras*. In another grouping one of agroup of nine *navasaktis* who, in southern India, rank higher than the *saptamataras*. Attributes: antelope, arrow, axe, bow, club, drum, prayer wheel, staff and trident.

Mahi (*earth*)

Minor goddess of sacrifice. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Depicted most frequently in the form of a buffalo, but he also confounds the

gods by changing himself into many other animal guises. He is eventually slain by the goddess Devi in the form of Mahisasuramardini.

Mahisasuramardini (*slayer of the buffal so demon*)

Form of the goddess Devi. Hindu (Puranic). Appearing from the fourth century AD onwards, this goddess is a *durga* form of Devi. She possesses up to twelve arms holding an assortment of weapons and may be seated on a lion. According to legend, the form arose in response to the threat from the demonic Mahisa who was eventually slain by the goddess Devi with his own sword. Attributes: axe, banner, beel, bow, club, conch, drum, hook, lizard, mirror, noose, prayer wheel, shield, sword, staff and trident. Three-eyed.

Mahodahi (*the great ocean*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (*Mahayana*). An attendant of Buddhakapala.

Maitreya (the loving one)

Origin Buddhest [India]. *Bodhisattva* or buddha-designate.

Known period of worship circa 500 BC to present.

Synonyms none.

Centre (s) of cult pan-Asiatic.

Art references metal and stone sculptures, paintings.

Literary sources Sadhanamals and Tantric ritual texts.

One of the most popular deities of the Mahyayana and Hinayana sects of Buddhism. He originates from the yellow mantra syllable MAIM in the Tusita heaven. He is also regarded as a *manusibuddha* or future human *buddha* He equates with Kalkin in Hinduism and is perceived as a happy, rubicund figure of benevolent character. He has no Sakti and his attendant animal is a lion. Colour: gold or yellow. Attributes: five *dhyanibuddhas*, flower, prayer wheel. shrine (in the hair) and water-jar. May be three-eyed or three-headed. He may also be identified symbolically

by white blossoms. Also Mi-lo Fo (Chinese).

Mala (*garland*)

Mother goddess. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. One of a group of astamatara deities. Colour: red or yellow. Attributes: garland of forest flowers, or of jewls.

Malhal Mata

Mother goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of seven *Saktis* who in later Hinduism became regarded as *saptamataras* (mothers) of evil intent, Particularly known in Bengal as a bringer of disease.

Mamaki (*greedy*)

Goddess. Buddhist. The *Sakti* of Ratnasambhava or Aksobhya. Also a *bodhisattva* or Aksobhya. Also a *bodhisattva* or future *buddha*, originating from the blue *mantra* MAM. Colour: yellow or blue. Attributes: cup, flowers, jewel, knife and staff.

Manasa

Snake goddess, Hindu. The daughter of Kasyapa and Kadru and the sister of the lord of serpents, Vasuki. She is also a gracious aspect of Parvati. Known particuarly from Bihar, Bengal and Assam. She stands upon, or is shaded by, a seven-headed snake. Attributes: snake and water-jar.

Manasi (*spiritual*)

Goddess of learning. Jain [India]. One of eixteen *vidyadevi* headed by the goddess Sarasvati.

Manavi (*descended from Manu*)

Goddess of leaming. Jain [India]. One of sixteen *vidyadevi* headed by the goddess Sarasvati.

sMan-Bla (*physician*)

God. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. One of the more popular medicine-buddhas and possibly derived from Persian light-religion. Attributes: fruit and water-jar.

Mandhata (*thoughtful*)

God. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Minor *avatara* of Visnu. One of the lords of the universe.'

Mangala (*auspicious*)

1. Astral god. Hindu. Personification of the planet Mars. Depicted by a chariot drawn by eigth red fire-horses. According to some authors Mangals is a form of the god Siva in his cruel aspect. Attributes: club and lotus. Three-eyed.

2. Goddess. A form of Parvati. She rides upon a lion and may bear up to ten arms, carrying arrow, mirror, moon dise, rosary, shield and sword. There-eyed.

Manipuri

In the north-east, bordering Burma is Manipur, a picturesque state of Indian Union. This legendary land of dance and music is rich in culture, traditions and religion. The land consists of two distinct geographical regions—the plains and the hills. The Meitis, the Vaishnavite Hindus live in valley-plains while over two dozen different tribes live in the hills and are Christians by faith. The people of Manipur, surrounded by senic splendour, wooded hills and sparkling lakes, are a great dance lovers and music enthusiasts. It is in their blood. They are born and bred to dance and music, as it were. The Manipuris consider themselves as the descendants of the *Gandharvas*, the legendary musicians, singers and dancers of the celestial court of Indra, at Amaravati. They feel very proud indeed of this mythological ancestory of theirs.

By nature the Manipuris are simple, contented, devout and aesthetic. There are many myths and legends which reveal their passionate love for arts, particularly for dance, music and mime. These are woven into the very fabric of their life like a beautiful pattern. A Manipuri legend describes the divine origin of Manipuri dance. Manipuri Dance is, in fact, a generic name and covers all the dance-forms of the land. Manipuri Dance can be called a house of many mansions. A myth would have us believe that Radha and Krishna were the original author and creator of Manipuri Dance.

Once, it so happened that the divine couple was engaged in the Ras-lila with the cowmaids of the Braj. Shiva and his consort Parvati happened to be there and were greatly delighted by the performance. Parvati was so moved by the spectacle that she herself wanted to indulge in that sort of gay abandon and frolicsome dance with her husband. She persisted that Shiva performed that type of Rasa in Lasya style with her. Shiva had to agree and assured to fulfil her desire soon.

Shiva was in search of an appropriate place for re-enactment of such a captivating dance-recital. He wandered here and there but hardly found a place which could satisfy him. Eventually he came to a place surrounded by undulating sylvan hills, but the beautiful valley was under a vast sheet of water. The scenic splendour of the place presented a befitting setting for the purpose, and Shiva decided to have his dance performed with Parvati there. With this view he struck his mighty trident into the side of southern hills and all the excessive water was drained off in no time and a ravishing valley emerged out.

There Shiva danced his Rasa-dance full of Lasya grace with Parvati. He did it without any break for seven days and as many nights. While he danced with his consort, the *Gandharvas* accompanied it on their various musical instruments producing soft. dulcet music appropriate for the occasion. The instrument included lutes, drums and *Penas.* And Atishesha or Ananta, the King of the serpents, flood-lit the whole of the area at night with its refulgent jewel or *mani* with which its central hood was supposed to be crowned. Because of this event the land came to be known as Manipur, the land of the Jewel. The rulers of Manipur were the descendants of Atishesa.

The people of Manipur are conscious that Arjuna, the Pandava hero. was also their ancestor. During his wanderings Arjuna happened to visit Manipur and married the Manipur princess Chitrangada, the daughter of King Chitrabhanu. In due course of time a son called Babhruvahan was born to them. Chitrangada herself was a matchless danseuse. Arjuna, as Brihannala had taught dance and music to the king of Virata's daughter Uttra. Arjuna had

learnt dancing and music from the Gandharvas. There was none equal to him in thes arts. For full one year of hiding in Virata's court he had taught music and dancing to the royal princess.

After many centuries the same Rasa-dance, which was originally performed by Radha and Krishna and later on repeated by Uma and Shiva in Manipur, was performed the third time but now by a different couple. They were not gods but two mortal human beings, Princess Thoibi and Khamba, an ordinary youth, rather a pauper, but quite a hero. These two star-crossed lovers died in tragic circumstances. The dance than these two lovers performed is known as Lai Haraoba. A big shrine stands at the place where these two lovers had died. Here Lai Haraoba is performed annually on a grand scale. They stand for ideal lovers. These myths and legends show how temperamentally the Manipuris are great lovers of dance and music and what great sanctity they attach to these.

Mythology and legends apart, the art-tradition in Manipur has been a ceaseless cultural flow since time immemorial. It is here more than anywhere else that religion, arts and living have been so magnificently blended as it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. Political emancipation of India was preceded by the cultural renaissance and regeneration of her literature, dance, music and other arts. It marked the rediscovery of her soul leading to the nation-wide currency and popularity of Manipuri dance along with other Indian classical dances. Today Manipuri Dance has become a ruling passion and an aesthetic obsession for initiated artists and the specttors alike because of its colourful adornment, lightness of dancing foot, delicacy of abhinaya, lilting music and poetic charm.

Laihoraoba

As already mentioned. Manipuri dance-form is a mansion of many houses, and it contains is its repertoire besides the Rasdances, the Choloms and Lai Haraboa dance. Lai Haraboa is performed all over Manipur, but chiefly at Moirang village in the memory of princess Thoibi and her lover Khamba, already referred to. Lai Haraoba is an annual festival: a ritual and a dance-drama performance all rolled into one and lasting for many days. It is also performed to appease the local deities. It is performed on the

outskirts of the village in front of the shrines of the deities of the shrines of the deities of the forest called umang lies. Lai Haraoba literally means ''merry making of gods.'' The participants of this dance and music mela begin to assemble on the village green in the afternoon and enjoy the festival till sun-set everyday in May. The participants include men, women, children, young and old from every walk and priestesses called maibas and *maibis* respectively. The males disguised as ancient Manipuri warriors and heroes and the women as princesses dance movements, not so well-knit, present a strange mixture of suggestiveness, ludicrous and wed revelry. It may be danced solo, in duet or in groups. The music that accompanies the dance consists of drums, flutes, *gongs, manjiras* and Pena which has a bunch of tiny bell tied on one end of its bow. The bells produce a subdued tinking sound in combination with the sombre and rather sad melody of the instrument proper, which resembles the music of a sarangi. However, the dancers do not put on ankle bells. It seems the episodes of *Khamba-Thoibi* romance were incorporated in the dance-drama afterwards. These episodes have been narrated in the Manipuri epic. In popularity this dance is next to *Ras-lila* dances. Lai Haraoba festival is a grand occasion for fun, merry-making and dancing. Maibis and their counterparts maibas aply the eading role. Through dance movements, gestures and facial expressions the dancers reveal how the universe was created and now how it is being continued by the Great Guru Shiva or Sidabad. The dance has many parts but the most striking one is the duet dance of Khamba and Thoibi.

Rasa Dances

Manipur is best known for its Rasa-dances which originated and developed with the advent and growth of Vaishnavism in Manipur from 16th century A.D. onwards. During second half of the 18th century Vaishnava cult to Shri Radha-Krishna was at its highest. Manipuri dances, based on the romance of Krishna and Radha, attained their maturity, perfection and utmost glory in that period. With this great phenomenon is associated the name of Maharaja Jai Singh, also known as Bhagya Chandra (1759-1798). He was a great patron of art and a devout and pious soul. Once Lord Krishna appeared to him in a dream and ordered him to install an image of

Him and begin the performance of Rasa-dance as a religious ceremony. Krishna taught the king the mysteries and intricacies of the dance. Lord Krishna's image was ritually installed in the shrine of Govindji in Imphal and the king himself carried out devotional services. His daughter princess Seiza Lairoibi, popularly known as Bimba-manjari was a dancer par excellence. During the first celebration it was she who danced the role of Radha and subsequently devoted ther complete life to the service of God Krishna. Her hand was given to Krishna in marriage by her father, and consequently she became Mira of Manipur. Dance was formalized, codified and stylized on the classical lines by great gurus of the art. It was then that four chief types of Rasa—the Maha Rasa, the Vasanta Rasa, the Kunj Rasa and the Nitya Rasa were composed. These were followed by the composition of three main Parengs—Brindaban Parang, Bhangi Parang and Khurum Parang.

Parangs are integral part of the Rasa-dances and procede the Rasa proper. They are related to Krishna legend, and are performed only by female dancers, but occasionally Krishna's role may be played by a young boy. Different types of Rasa is performed on different occasions in the Nat Mandap or the big dancing halls attached amost to every temple of Krishna in Manipur. It may be noted that movements of the neck, the breasts and of hips are not allowed in any of these dance-forms as they are regarded vulgar and below the dignity and grandeur of Manipuri dance which is essentially devotional, religious and has its roots in Bhakti cult of Vaishnavism. Here dance has been visualized as a worshipful ritual, a prayer performed and aimed at revealing the inner beauty of the soul ever yearning to be united with the cosmic soul expressed through Lord Krishna. A great sanctity is attached to every part of dancing in Manipur. Being classical in form and content. the Manipur dance is based on a Manipuri scripture *Leithak Leikharole*, which itself is based on ancient Sanskrit texts on the subject including the Natyashastra of Bharata Muni.

Besides these there are other numbers called *Choloms*. Significant in this class are *Poong Cholom* and *Kartal Cholom*. A *Cholom* dance is always virile, vigorous and sturdy and represents the

Tandava aspects of the art. It involves a lot of turning, swaying, whirling, jumping and strong spiral movements. Therefore, it is performed only by men.

The orchestra of Rasa-dance consists of *Khol* or *Mridanga, Manjira* (cymbals) and *flute*. The text or songs are from great saint-lyricists like Jayadeva, Vidyapati, Chandidas or from the Bhagavat Puran. The costume of the Rasa dancers is rich, ornamented and extremely capptivating. Radha and his friends wear light velvet blouses richly embroidered and ornamented with gold threads. Similarly, the skirts of slik, swining, and awaying above the ankles, they wear, are as if from another world. They are lined with cardboard to make them stiff. They are studded with small coloured mirrors and bordered exquisitely with sequins. The skirt is always of silk and dark red ro green in colours. Over this long skirt is worn a shorter one of fine white muslin. A broad stretch of white is bound around the waist which very charmingly accentuates the slimness of the waist above the broad swaying and swinging skirt. The veil worn by a Manipur danseuse in this form od dance, is a translucent gossamer. The sight of the costume itself is a great feast of colours, splendour and delicacy.

Krishna wears a silk dhoti, a dark velvet jacket and a profusely jewelled crown topped with peacock feathers. If a boy of tender age happens to be personating the role of Krisma in place of a girl, his body above the waist is without clothing but tastefuly adorned with plenty of ornaments—necklaces, armlets, bangles, a long garland, etc.

In this dance-form the Lasya aspects predominate. Here three elements of Nritta, Nritya and Natya are equally balanced. Being rich in emotional content and sentiment of love, the *Sringar Rasa* (erotic mood) pervades the entire performance though there are occasional portrayal of other moods and bhavas as well. For the fullest possible expression of Sringar (erotic flavour) all the four forms of abhinaya—Angika, Satvika, Vachika and Anarya can be seen here in full play. And this requires an arduous training and discipline of the artist from the very young age under the guidance of expert gurus.

The Rasa dances of Manipur include the Maha Rasa, the Vasant Rasa, the Nitaya Rasa and a few more. These are essentially idyllic, graceful and based on the themes taken from Bhagavta Purana. Obviouslv. Krishna is the central figure of all these dances. The Maharasa is performed on full-moon day in October. Krishna, Radha and her chosen friends form the rasamandala to perform this centre of the mandala, and then again a multiple of Krishna between each two gopis. It is by his maya (illusion) that he thus duplicates himself many times. The circle, light footwork in which the heels never touch the floor, interpretation of the emotionally charged tale of suffering of Radha and gopis because of separation from Krishna, delicacy of abhinaya are main characteristics of this dance.

The Vasanta Rasa, as is obvious from its name, is performed aring spring season, again on the full moon day. It is on the pattern of Maha Rasa and consists of many pure dance items, chanting and singing and interpretation of expressional number through abhinaya. The dance is introduced with chanting and singing and dancing and is followed by solo dance of Radha Krishna and each of the gopis. They throw coloured powder or each other and play Hori. But Krishna's deut dance with Chandravati only displeases Radha, and she immediately ieaves the circle of dance leaving her blue veil which symbolises her devotion and love for Krishna. Ultimately she is reconciled when Krishna begs her forgiveness and lays his crown at her feet. Then they all dance together. The Nitya Rasa is for any occasion religious or social. These dances are performed generally at night in the dancing halls attached to the temples. The halls are profusely and tastefully decorated with garlands, flowers, flags, buntings, etc. on the occasion. Truly classical in spirit, the Rasa-dances are full of devotional fervour and are performed to the singing of songs and kirtanas and to the accompaniment of khol or mridanga, manjira and bamboo flutes. The theme, invariably from the Bhagavata Purana, varies according to the type of Rasa in which different episodes are linked together with dialogues and songs. Their liquid beauty, lyrical quality, restrained and rhythmic swaying, swinging and spinning almost at one place, with hands close to the body, coupled with soft vocal

and instrumental devotional music lend the performance a uniqueness which defies description.

Choloms

The other Manipur dance-form known, as Choloms, is also the gift of *Vaishnava bhakti* cult. Of these *Poong Cholom* and *Kartal Cholom* are most significant. In Choloms Tandaya aspects of the dance are displayed to a great advantage. A Poong is a type of drum or mridanga. Since it is a dance with drums, it is called a Poong Cholom. The dancer plays on his drum suspended from the neck or across the right shoulder while dancing. A cholom is a purely male affair. A number of dancer-drummers form a *ardhamandala* or semi-circle and spin, sway, whirl, lean, bend, crouch sit and perform acrobatics while playing on their drums at a bary fast speed. The drum-rhythms and dance-movements, perfectly synchronized, present an unforgettable sight of flexibility, manyl grace, strength and harmony. It can be performed solo, as a duet or a group dance consisting of any number from twelve to a hundred dancers. Dressed in snow-white clothes, turbans and flowing scarves, the dancers give the impression of sea-waves now thundering, now flowing gently in cadence against the spray-washed and moon-bleached coast.

In *Kartal Cholom* the dancers paly various rhythmic patterns on their large metal cymbals or *Kartals* in perfect harmony with the rhythms of the drums. They play on their tasselled cymbals while they dance in a semi-circle, backwards and forwards. sway, swing and jump and imitate the gait of a peacock, a swan, or a waigtail. The number of participants varies according to the occasion. They wear the same dress as in *Poong cholm* and the only difference being that here the *dhoties* are of printed design.

Manjughosa (*sweet sounding*)

God. Buddhist. Form of the god Manjusri and an emanation of Aksobhya. Attended by a lion. Colour: white or gold.

Attributes: arrow, bell, blue lotus, book, bow, image of Aksobhya. staff and sword.

Manjusri (*pleasing splendour*)

Origin Buddhist [India]. *Bodhisattva* or buddha-designate, also god of wisdom.

Known period of worship circa 500 BC until present.

Synonyms large number of forms.

Centre (s) of cult pan- Asiatic.

Art references metal and stone sculptures, paintings,

Literary sources Sadhanamala and Tantric ritual texts.

An important and popular deity throughout all sects of Buddhism. He is the son of either Amitabha or Aksobhya and is closely linked with the goddess Prajnaparamita who is seen as the personification of a holy text which Manjusri habitualy carries, the pustaka. His attendant animal is the tiger or the lion. Colour: black, white, red or yellow. Attributes: chiefly book and sword, but also arrow, blue lotus and bow. May be three-headed.

Manmatha

From of the god of carnal love. Dravidain (Tamil). A local southern Indian form of Kama with similar attributes and genealogy named in Sangam literature.

Mantras & Mantra Yoga

Mantra Yoga originated from the Vedas and Tantras. This yoga brings about changes in material consciousness by the agency of sound. Of course, the 'sound's Mantra Yoga is referring to is a mysterious sound which you cannot hear by the human ear.

From modern science. we know three important facts. 1. Matter is an expression of energy. 2. This energy vibrates at different frequencies in different types of matter. 3. Our sense-organs can only receive sensations made in a very limited frequency-range. For example, we can hear only the sound produced in a limited-frequency range and anything above this range is called *Ultra Sound* and the sound below it is called *Infra Sound.* Of course, by no means can one conclude that the sound in Mantra Yoga belongs

to one of the categories above. We would say that Mantra Yoga is based on the bibratory aspect of energy and its modifications into varied matter. Mantras are used to bring about substantial results as well as the unification and unfolding of consoiousness. Mantra Yoga as such is not a special yoga, instead it is widely used by devotees belonging to all other yogas for spiritual upliftment and unfolding of consciousness.

Mantra combines two root words Man—To think and Tra—Instrumentaliy. In brief, Mantra is thought—form. Mantra is a magic formula of incantation or spell. Most of the important Mantras came from Tantras. In Hinduism, deities are represented by Mantras and each deity is associated with a particular Manatra. It is said that the power of the Mantra brings down the deity to enter an image and then the image comes 'alive'. All Mantras are made of letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. It is believed that each letter has the potency of infinite power and when several of these letters are properly grouped into a Mantra, then that Mantra contributes to create a special effect. According to the power of the Mantras, they are grouped into Male, Female and Neutral types. The Mantras that end in 'Hum' or 'Phat' are called masculine Mantras, those that end in 'Svaha' are called feminine Mantras and Mantras that end in 'Namah' are called neutral Mantras. There are 52 letters in the Sanskrit alphabet. so there are 52 elements or powers which are available for producing Mantras in many different combinations. Of course nobody can say that sounds produced by the Sanskrit alphabet alone can become a Mantra. The only point to state here is that Hindu Mantras are made by the ancient scientists of the Vedic age called Rishis and an indepth evaluation had taken place before accepting any word combinations as Mantra. There is an endless number of Mantras in Hinduism.

To begin with, a Mantra should be given to a devotee by a Guru, if the fullest benefit is to be derived from it. Of course, one can pick up any Mantra and start chanting it. and as long as the person has faith in that Mantra he will receive some positive results. Japa is the best known technique in Mantra Yoga. in which Mantra is repeated constantly, first audibly by the human voice and then

silently and mentally. As a devotee continues chanting his favorite Mantra, he will notice changes in his consciousness. But it is not necessary to see any changes in his physical body. There are several types of Mantras, among which Pranava and Gayatri are most popular. Just as a seed grows into a particular kind of tree according to the type of seed, so too is the effect of each Mantra. The Mantra, which Hare Krishna devotees chant is:

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama, Rama, Hare Hare: This Mantra is specifically used to free one from karms or bondage according to the Srimad Maha Bhagavata written by Sage Vyasa.

Another popular Mantra is:

Sree Ram, Jaya Ram, Jaya Jaya Ram

Sree Rami, Jaya Ram, Jaya Jaya Ram.

There are very many Mantras in Hinduism. There are even Mantras like *Vasikarani Mantra* to attract the opposite sex.

Manu

Primordial creator god. Hindu (Vedic). The son (s) of Surya. The name given to the fourteen original progenitors of mankind during the mythical or heroic ages. According to tradition, the consort of Manu is Ida, who was engendered from milk and butter offered to Siva as a propitiation.

Mara *(the destroyer)*

1. God. Buddhist. An evil deity who puts obstacles in the way of the Buddha. The equal of the Hindu god Kama. In Buddhist tradition, the Hindu gods Indra, Brahma, Visnu and Siva are maras who become vanquished by various Buddhist deities. Attributes: fish standard. 2. God. Hindu. An epithet of Kama(deva).

Mari *(killing)*

1. Deification of literature. Buddhist. One of a group of *dharanis.* Colour: reddish white. Attributes: needle, thread and staff. 2. Mother goddess. Dravidian (Tamil) [southern India].

Mari Mai (*mother death*)

Plague goddess. Hindu. The sister of Sitala. associated with cholera. Her Tamil counterpart is Mariyamman.

Marici (*shining*)

1. Astral goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An emanation Vairocana and also his female aspect or *Sakti.* She is further identified as a *buddha*-designate or *bodhisattva.* She may also be the mother of *Sakyamuni* (a form of the Buddha). Considered by some to be the equal of the Hindu Surya. She may be depicted in a three-headed form (as the Sakti of Hayagriva), in which case her left head is that of a pig. She rides in a chariot drawan by seven boars. Colour: red, yellow or white. Attributes: arrow, bow, fly whisk. horse's head image in the hair, needle, prayer wheel, staff, sword, thread and trident. Three-eyed.

2. Demiurge. Hindu. A product of the creator god Brahma.

Mariyamman (*mother of smallpox*)

Plague goddess. Dravidian (Tamil) [southern India]. A terrible goddess, one of the *navasaktis* and linded with the goddess Kali. Whe is honoured in a ritual during which victims (in penance) are suspended from a rope and an iron hood through the flesh of the back and whirled around a pole. Also Mariyattal.

Marutgana

Storm gods. Hindu (Vedic). The sons of Rudra-and attendants of Indra. Also Maruts.

Mata (*great mother*)

Primeval mother goddess. Hindu. The archetypal progenitrix of all living things. She becomes the tutelary goddess of every village in northern India. but is also seen as a plague goddess associated with smallpox. in which case her epithet becomes Maha Mai. Her Tamil counterpart is Amman.

Matara

Mother goddess. Hindu. Applied collectively to groups of deities.

the divine mothers, also more specifically to the consort of the god Kasyana. As divine mothers they are also regarded as Saktis. The numbers vary according to separate traditions and they are therefore identified as the *saptamataras* (seven), *astamataras* (eight) and *navasaktis* (nine). Less comonly there may be up to fifty mataras in a group. Their images are normally carved in stone (very few exist in metal) and they are depicted seated, often upon a corpse, and may be of terrifying appearance.

Matarisvan

Minor messenger god. Hindu (Vedic). The attendant of Agni.

Matsya

Incarnation of the god Visnu. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). In this first *avatara* Visnu appears as a fish which, according to one legend, tows a ship carrying the law-giver Manu to safety after the primal flood. Matsya engages in an epic battle with the demon Hayagriva who stole the *Vedas* from a sleeping Brahma. Usually depicted with a human torso carrying symbols, e.g. wheel and conch, on a fish's body.

Maya (*devi*)

Mother goddess. Buddhist. The mother of the Buddha perceived as the world lotus or *padma* from which the Buddha was born. She equates with the Hindu goddess Laksmi. The term is also applied to the personification of the visible universe and, in Hinduism, as an epithet of the goddess Durga.

Mayajalakrama-Kurukulla (*one who proceeds in the net of illusion*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). The personification of all *dhyanibuddhas*. Colour: red. Attributes: arrow, bow, hook, images of the five dhyanibuddhas, lotus (red), pitcher rosary and water- jar.

Mayon (*the black one*)

Creator god. Early Dravidian (Tamil) [southern India and Sri Lanka] Animistic high god of the pastoral regions, found in Sangam literautre and thought to reside in trees. Perhaps equating with Visnu or Krisna.

Medha (*wisdom*)

Minor goddess. Buddist [Mahayana). The Sakti of Sridhara.

Meditation

There are thousands of books on meditation and thousands of definitions on the state or result of mediation. Hinduism itself talks about 20 different levels of consciousness or mental stages. So to put it very mildly, meditation is the art of making the mind still. To explain it in layman's terms, By meditation one enters a state of mind where there are no thoughts.

Mind also has thousands of definitions and if you read them all you will be more confused than ever before. The easiest definition will be: Mind is a space in which planets or thoughts repose. So if we say mind has become still, it means mind has entered a thought-less state.

To begin with, people confuse themselves with all kinds of definitions on meditiation and attach unnecessary spiritual dogmas to it. Some even give undue importance to the whole idea of meditation with a very snobbish outlook. People come and proudly say, "I wasmeditating for the last four hours" and so on. So what? Did you ever hear anyone come and say that he/she was sleeping for the last eight hours, hence the whole world should salute them. All those things, as I said above, are hindrances to proper mediation.

So the first thing is to understand that mediation is as natural as sleep (Sushupti) and it a vital exercise requiredof all human beings from cradle to grave.

The art of meditation itself is grossly misunderstood by many people. Many yogis make controlling the mind as a prerequisite for mediation instead of saying a controlled mind is the result or fruit of mediation. Trying to wilfully control the mind is like attempting to control the activities of a monkey running around the forest. Nobody can fight the mind and win. Mind is a very powerful force. The only thing anyone can do is to tame it by proper methods. Even Krishna acknowledges the power of the mind and tells a

bewildered Arjuna: "Doubtless. On! great warrior, the mind is difficult to subdue. It is restless all the time but oh! son of Kunti mind can be conquered by repeated exercises and dispassion to sensual objects. (Bhagavad Gita, Chap. 6: 34).

There are so many ways of mediation; some of them direct and some are indirect. One direct way is to watch the mind. That is to watch the thoughts that come to the mind without in any way controlling or trying to participate in those thoughts. This method may sound difficult but when you start practising it, many of the questions you now have will vanish altogether. Pranayama and Mantra Japa are indirect ways of watching the mind.

"Do's and dont's" you have mentioned are known as Yama-Niyamas. I have no intention to belittle their importance. I feel people generally deal with religion with an intention of changing everything overnight. In fact they do act exactly like trving to make a perfect vacuum. But there is no such thing as a perfect vacuum. But at the same time it is easy to replace one form of gas with anothr gas in an airtight chamber. That is the idea on which I am basing my theory. We should first earnestly start meditation exercises and be less harsh on ourselves with Do's and Dont's. That does not mean we should tolerate uncontrolled emotions. For example, if you are watching TV for 6 to 7 hours daily, then try to reduce it to 1 to 2 hours and watch it constructively. If you have the habit of eating every now and then, try to change it to three times daily and so on. Changes should be made without giving the mind a chance to fight back with force. Remember Lord Krishna said: "Yoga is not for those who do not eat at all nor for those who eat like a glutton. Yoga is not for those who do not sleep and those who sleep night and day." We are not living in the Himalayas but in cities where thousands of sensual objects pop up every now and then to stimulate our senses. *Moderation is the name of the game.*

Science is still to explore this topic. The only thing we know so far is that during mediation the body gets relaxed and there is a change in the brain electrical waves. The parapsychological departments throughout the world are conducting a lot of experiments on the

results of mediation, but so far nobody has come up with anything except stating that during mediation the brain makes alpha waves and sometimes even theta and delta waves.

Misreresentation of Hinduism

Daddy, whenever people talk about Hinduism, they bring up "holy cow,", "untouchables", many gods" etc. and they conclude that Hinduism is a stupid religion. Are they right?

They are rigth in much the same way as concluding that New York means "Harlem and Time Square". Those ugly, downtrodden places are parts of New York city, but we all know that they do not represent the real New York. Broadway, Museums, art galleries and thousands of God-fearing multicoloured citizens make New York. The same argument goes for Hinduism. Of course, since Hinduism is a losyly developed Thinking Process and it gave absolute freedom of thought and action to its followers, it has so many contradictory aspects. The holy cow, caste system etc. are parts of Hinduism, but they do not constitute Hinduism. Even mythology is actually intended for common people, who cannot understand the truths in Vedas and Upanishads.

Advaita philosophy, the Bhagavad Gita, Raja Yoga, Panayama, Mantras etc. are the pillars of Hinduism. Anyone who does NOT want to discuss them is only searching for dirt and they are getting dirt, barrels and barrels of it.

Most critics look at Hinduism with a preconceived notion and a colored vision. By doing so, they are actually degrading themselves to the level of the Romans who accused Jesus Christ of blasphemy What a shame!

Mitra *(friend)*

Minor sun god. Hindu (Vedic and Puranic). An aditya. one of six descendants of Āditi, he was originally associated with Vauna (Vedic), ruling the day while Varuna ruled the might. It is from this model that first Mithra (persiany) and then Mithras (Roman) were derived. He is also the god of intimate friendship. Attributes: two lotus, trident and a sacrificial drink or soma.

Modern Hinduism

Familiarity with the ancient and medieval froms of Hinduism does not prepare us to meet modern educated Hindus without puzzling surprises. To help understand the radical changes that have occurred in the Hindu outlook, we shall notice the most important developments in India's political and cultural history during the past three centuries.

During the Middle Ages, Muslim invaders entered India in great force, and for five centuries they India is great force, and for five centuries they dominated the subcontinent. By 1700, several parts of India had become predominantly Muslim in religion, but the Muslim power was spent, and India as a whole had remained faithful to Hinduism. After the death in 1707 of Aurangzeb, the last great Mughul emperor, the Mughul Empire declined rapidly. For the next fifty years India lay in a state of anarchy. European merchants, protected be a few soldiers, had long operated trading posts alsong the Indian coastline. Now, raising mercenary armies, the Europeans began to move into the political vacuum left by the Mughul empire's disintegration. by 1757 the Brithish East India Company had gained control of India's most prosperous provinces, and by 1818 the Brithish had eliminated all serious rivals for the control of the entire land.

The British Presence

The two centuries of British rule that now followed were much more disturbing to the Hindus outlook than the five preceding centuries of control by Muslims, despite the latter's aggresive attitude toward Hinduism. There were two reasons for India's stronger reaction to the British presence. First, the British, unlike the Muslims, brought to India powerful new economic institutions. The development of Western shipping on the Indian coast drew India into a worldwide commercial network for the large-scale exchange of goods and soon Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, and inland cities as well became huge trading centers.

This development brought with it a great in crease in the proportion of the population engaged in trade and making a living outside the

economic system of India's tightly knit villages. Of all caste Hindus, the merchants had always been the most free to adopt whatever forms of religion they wished, and now much larger classes of people in the new commercial centers became immune to economic pressures toward conformit. Family and caste assemblies could still bring heavy presure on their individual members, but the termination of livelihood—the threat that had kept members of the viallage communities in line could no longer be used effectively. When the Industrial Revolution reached India and factories became a major source of livelihood in the towns, millions of Hindus became free to follow radical religious leaders of their own personal choice.

The second reason for the strong reaction to British culture was the activity of the British government in promoting education. Although the network of educational institutions supported by the Brithish government was minimal at first by present-day standards, it far exceeded the public education offered by Hindu and Muslim rulers. Early in the nineteenth century some schools began to teach Western learnings as well as traditional Indian subjects. As early as 1817 the Hindu College was established in Calcutta to instruct young men in the English language and literature, and Christian missionaries soon opened similar schools and colleges.

The Hindu response was positive. In 1835 a momentous decision was made to conduct government-supported education mainly in English and to make the Western arts and sciences a principal part of the curriculum. In the same period European printing presses, set up in India in unprecedented numbers, made the literature of European culture easily available to increasing numbers of Indians who could read English.

In order to appreciate the collision of ideas that occurred, we need to examine the Hinduism prevailing in about 1800 and the shocking contrasts with which it was confronted. In the popular cults, many of the Hindu practices at the beginning of the nineteenth century concentrated on finding protection against the dangers of the natural world. On the doctrinal level the central Hindu ideas had the function of supporting the caste system. Belief

in karma and rebirth rationalized the assignment of hereditary work and unequal distribution ofopportunities and honors, and justified the subjection of women in general and harsh treatment of women in general and harsh treatment of widows in particular. The deprivations that old Hinduism imposed on many were made tolerable by teaching the evil of material desires, by offering loftier satisfactions in transcendent realms, and by denying the significance—or even the reality—of the whole physical world. Hinduism provided no rational justification for at tempting to change the world. The way to happiness lay in a personal liberation from the world, not in trying to transform it into a place of freedom ognition of the need to support social intitutions, did not advise dwelling long in this world; either physically or in one's fondnesses (9.33). It was the soul, not the world, that was capable of salvation. The corporate progress of a people did not fall within the aspirational concepts of Hindu thought. Even the idea of nation had no adequate expression in the vocabulary of Indian languages.

The British brought to India in the early nineteenth century a social optimism unusual even in Western history. An advancing medical science of fered the possbility of freedom from poverty. Indjustices could be indentified and righted, and the world could be perfected. In this Western dream of social progress, nations figured as prominently as did individuals.

From its base in biblical thinking, the Western mind conceived of the nation as a fundamental unit of moral responsibility and as a soteriological community. The British brought with them a pride and hope in one's nation that the Hindus perceived as a refreshing proposal.

The Europeans of the time were able not only to proclaim an eloquent faith in the world's regeneration but also to take actions toward that end with impressive results. The power of Western learning was as obvious to Hindu observers as the power of the new steamboats that could transport huge cargoes upstream on Indian rivers. Vaccination was clearly more effective for its purpose then offerings to the smallpox goddess. Young Hindus did not take long to decide that they wanted to learn the Western

knowledge and to participate in its power.

This clear decision among the early generations of Western-educated Indians soon began to produce new movements within Hinduism. Between 1800 and 1947 there were few Hindu champions of innovation who were not also reformers of religion. The first of the Hindu movements that reflect the Western impact is the Brahmo Samaj, founded in 1828 by a Bengali brahman named Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833).

The Brahmo Samaj (Society of Believers in Brahman)

For generations Ram Mohan Roy's family had served Muslim rulers. He was sent was a boy to Muslim schools, where he learned Persian and Arabic and absorbed Muslim attitudes, including hostility toward the British. However, in 1803 he went into the revenue service of the East Inid Company and under the guidance of a friendly British official Ram Mohan perfected his knowledge of English. Becoming acquainted with English literature and Western thought, he reversed his original negative opinion of Western culture and became a supporter of a temporary British rule over India and an advocae of Western education.

In 1814 Ram Mohan Roy retired from government service to promote his ideas regarding religion and morality. He denounced polytheism, idolatry, and morality. He denounced polytheism, idolatry, and certain Hindu social practices he deemed harmful to society. He decried the neglect of women's education and current harsh treatment of widows, and he supported, in 1829, the British government's decision to abolish by law the practice of burning widows alive at the time of their husbands cremation. He promoted the founding of colleges and schools to teach Western literature and science.

Early in his retirement Ram Mohan studied the Bible under the guidance of Christian missionaries. He developed a lasting admiration for the moral precepts and example of Jesus but was unable to accept the Christian belief in Jesus' divinity or in the atoning value of his death. Then Ram Mohan examined the Upanishads and Vedanta sutras and concluded that they taught a

simple monotheism entirely free of polytheism and idolatry. He rested his monotheistic belief, therefore on the Upanishads, which are counted as part of the authoritative vedic literature, and argued for the recognition of his beliefs as vedic and orthodox teaching.

In 1828 Ram Mohan founded the Brahmo Samaj, a religious association that met weekly for a congregational style of worship that is quite unusual in Hinduism. It included prayers, hymns, and sermons expounding such scriptures as the Kena, Isa Mundaka, and Katha Upanishads.

The members were usually persons of high social position and good education. After Ram Mohan's death the Brahmo Samaj was guided by new leaders whose demands for reform became increasingly incompatible with orthodox Hinduism.

Under the leadership of Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), the Brahmo Samaj studied the Vedas more thoroughly and dropped its claim to orthodoxy. Taking reason and conscience rather than the Vedas as the final authority in religion, the Brahmo Samaj taught thereafter that scriptures were to be regarded as valid only when their message was confirmed by a light within the heart. In the society's earlier period its members had been urged only to make no claim to superior dignity by reason of their high caste. Now they were asked to repudiate their caste identities entirely. The society pressed for laws against child marriage. They attacked polygamy, and for the old samskara rituals they devised replacements from which all references to the many gods were eliminated. Through out the nineteenth centhury the Brahmo Samaj kept the Hindu upper classes in an uproar of argument for and against their daring demands.

Sharp differences of opinion divided and weakened the group in the latter part of the century, and today the Brahmo Samaj has only a few, thousand members. The movement's theological ideas have not become Samaj won its social battles, so substantially altering public opinion that by 1900 it was no longer necessary for Hindus to join a hetereodox sect and surrender membership in family and caste when they undertook to attack the inequilities and extravagances of traditional Hinduism.

The Arya Samaj (Aryan Society)

About the time when the reformist commotion of the Brahmo Samaj was at its height in Bengal, Svami Dayananda Sarasvati (1821- 1883) launched a very different campaign for change in northwestern India. (Svami is a title of respect given to a religious teacher.) Born to a devout Saiva family in Guiarat, Davananda at an early age rejected the worship of Siva. Becoming an ascetic at twenty-one, he wandered for some years in search of a satisfactory faith. At last in Mathura he found his guru in a fiery and eccentric teacher named Virajananda, who allowed his disciples to study nothing but Sanskrit grammar and a law of the oldest vedic scriptures. Virajananda loathed the puranas and all the popular gods of Hinduism. In 1863 Dayananda began his own compaign against polytheism and idolatry. Lecturing in Sanskrit before priestly audiences, he attacked pujas and pilgrimges, dented the divinity of Rama and Krisna, and asserted that the brahmans had no herefitary rights.

In 1874 Dayananda began to address more popular groups in Hindi with much success, and wrote in Hindi his principal book, The *Light of Truth.* The following year the founded the Arya Samaj. It spread quickly throughout the Hindi-speaking areas, making the following major proclamations:

1. India must resume its allegiance to the oldest religious literature of the land. The Vedas alone—by which Dayananda meant the Word of God. The Brahmanas and Upanishads are authoritative only when they are in full agreement with the samhitas. Dayananda had no use whatsoever for the puranas and the smritis—not even for the Bhagavadgita.

2. Since the word jati is not found in the Vedas. hereditary occupational castes have no place in true Hindu religion. But because the names of the four varnas are found in the Vedas, the terms brahman, ksatriya, vaisya, and sudra may be used to refer to flexible classes to which Aryans may belong, not according to birth, but according to their level of ability. Anyone may study the Vedas. Today the Arya Samaj promotes the education of women, permits widows to remarry, allows intercaste dining and even

intercaste marriage, and denounces child marriage and polygamy.

3. The Vedas are the source of all truth, scientific as well as religious. Using an unusual method of translation, Arya Samaj scholars find proof in the vedas that the sages worshiped only one God, of personal nature, and that they were already acquainted millions of years ago with such supposedly modern inventions as the steam engine, telegraph, and airplane. According to the Arya Samaj, Indians who were taking up the study of Western science were merely recovering an Indian knowledge that had been lost.

4. The Vedas record the true original religion of humanity and are the ultimate source of those fragmentary truths that non- Hindu faiths sometimes retain in a corrupted form *The Light of Truth* gives Hinduism the central place in the historical development of the world's religions. The book vilifies Inlam, Christianity, and those forms of Hinduism that Dayananda detested, and it begins an important modern tendency toward the vehement glorification of Hinduism.

The Arya Samaj has been bitterly hostile to foreign cultural influences in India. Dayananda fought the resurgent Muslim movements of the mid-nineteenth century and opposed the missionary activities of Christians. For the first fifty years of its existence, the society continued to gather into its fellowship many reform-minded, middle-class Hindus. No longer seen as a shockingly radical organization, the Arya Samaj exists quietly today as as stabe religious group with about half a million members. Though the Arya Samaj does not participate as an organization in politics, it has revived a long-lost understanding that civic concerns are religious concerns. Many of its members are important public figures.

Hindu Religious Nationalism

Svami Dayananda's controlled resentment of Western influence in India was a light squall preceding a hurricane. In the late nineteenth century the sons of upper-class Indian families began to graduate from Indian universities with a new ambivalence of feeling toward Western culture. Western studies, like cut flowers transplanted

from an other garden had failed to root successfully in Indian soil. Even those students who acquired a deep knowledge of the West were often offended by the aloofness of the Europeans in India, who did not grant them the dignity of full acceptance in a world culture.

About this time, the research of European scholars into India's forgotten past uncovered records of a happier and greater India of pre-Islamic times, in which enlightened Hindu rulers had patronized brilliant systems of thought and great works of literature and art. Hindu religious leaders now called on the young men of Inid to identify themselves with that brighter ancient heritage, and begining about 1890 a passionate nationalism with religious overtone began to grow in the minds of many literate young Hindus. They viewed the West as a crass and worldly civilization, advanced only in the natural sciences, and saw the East as a spiritual culture destined to teach the world the art of lofty living. The rule of foreigners came to be regarded as a moral outrage. All the emotional devices of the Way of Devotion were brought into the service of a new object of devotion, the Indian nation itself, and the liberation of India became the goal of this half-religious nationalism.

India was sometimes conceived as a divine Mother in the form of the goddess Kali. Beginning in 1905 secret societies were organized, especially in Bengal, for violent revolutionary action. At altars of Kali, on which revolvers had been heaped, recruits vowed to bring bloody offerings to the Mother. A training manual entilted *Bhavani Mandir* (The temple of Kali) assured future assassins that their acts would bring the world to the light of Hinduism. Between 1908 and 1917 more than a hundred oficials of the British government were killed or wounded by members of such societies. But nationalists in the Hindi-speaking areas, less accustomed than the Bengalis to making blood offerings to Kali, cultivated a reverence for a milder figure called Bharal Mata (Mother India).

The first great political leader of Hindu ultranationalism was Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920), a brahman from westerr India. In honor of the god Ganesa, the elephant-headed son of Siva, Tilak

devised a new festival as an occasion for carrying anti-British songs and dramas to the people, and he taught the Bhagavadgita with emphasis on such militant lines as "Fight, O son of Bharata!" (2.18). Chauvinistic nationalism reached its peak in the first two decades of the twentieth century, but it has continued to have strong spokesmen. A protege of Tilak named V.C. Savarkar (1883-1966) organized the Hindu Mahasabha, a cultural society for the promotion of Hindu nationalism. The Hindu Mahasabha created as an auxiliary a young men's uniformed action group called the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangha, popularly known as the R.S.S. To extend its influence in Indian legislatures, the R.S.S. in 1951 established a political party called the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (Indian People's Party).

The basic premise of these groups is that India must be preserved in a fivefold unity: one land, one race, one religion, one culture, and one language. They believe that Pakistan and Bangladesh must be reunited with India and with Hinduism and that all Muslim, British, and other foreign influences must be eliminated.

Mahatma Gandhi

Fortunately for the outside world, India's independence was not won by such ultranatonalists but by such ultranatonalists but by forces led by Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948). Gandhi was a religious leader of a radically new type. Not a brahman, he was born in a port city of Gujarat into a family of the vaisya or merchant class. By profession Gandhi was first a lawyer and later a social reformer and political leader. He was not learned in Hindu literature, nor was he a systematic religious thinker. Yet his religious leadership has touched to some degree all present-day Hindus, who everywhere speak of him reverentially as Mahatma (The Great-Souled One). After studying law in England, Gandhi was admitted to the bar in India. Soon after, he moved to South Africa, where for many years he led a niolent movement to protect the rights of Indians living in that country After returning to India, he became in 1920 a leader of the Indian National Congress, and thanks to his skillful direction, India at last became a free republic in 1947. The following year, while conducting a prayer meeting in

New Delhi, he was assassinated by a fanatical Hindu nationalist of the outlook just described.

It is possible here to describe only a few aspects of Gandhi's far-ranging and original personal faith. The scriptures that Gandhi loved most were the *Ramcaritmanas* of Tulst Das, the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament, and especially, the Bhagavadgita. His choice of scriptures reflects the centrality of moral and social concerns in his religious life. Despite his reverence for many scriptures, Gandhi was not bound by the authority of any of them but held that one should check them against a still small voice of conscience that can speak with divine authority within one's own heart, revealing the way of right action. Though Gandhi's assumptions about the nature of God and the universe were the general theological ideas of the Vaisnavas, he was not interested in theoretical discussions and preferred the simple statement, "God is Truth." By this he meant that God is the basis for order and law and the force that supports moral righteousness in the would. He delighted in the precepts associated with Krisna and Rama without attaching any value to the myths about them. Yet God for him was not an abstract principle but a Spirit endowed with purpose, who hears prayers and supports and guides those who struggle in the cause of right in all areas of life, including politics.

Gandhi held that all religions originate in a universal operation of the inner Voice. The precepts of the great religions vary in externals because of the differences in the languages and cultural institutions in which the impulsions of conscience are expressed. For this reason, each religion speaks with unique effectiveness to the people of its own culture. Though the religions are equal in value, they are not of equal value in all lands. The religion of another people cannot effectively replace one's won. and conversion to a foreign religion does not produce a vital and well-functioning faith.

Gandhi's powerful and courageous tactic for social reform was called *satyagraha* (holding onto truth). It was based on his confidence that God, in the form of Truth and the Voice that utters it, is present also in the hearts of wrongdoers. Gandhi taught that

believers in satyagraha must seek to awaken in their oppressors their own inner voice so that they will themselves perceive their wrong doing and voluntarily cease to do wrong. One should not seek parsonal victories over opponents but the victory of Truth, which belongs as much to one's opponent as to oneself. Such victories cannot be attained by violent means. Gandhi's great campaigns for national independence were often launched under the guidance of his own inner voice; in essence they were demands that the British rulers consult the voice within themselves with regard to what was right. Gandhi's faith so impressed the world that in the 1960s Martin Luther King, Jr., made effective use of satyagraha techniques to advance the goals of the American civil rights movement.

Recent Religious Leaders

The religious life of most Hindus has continued in the modern period in familiar patterns under the guidance of religious leaders of old types. Some of these traditional leaders have been gifted persons of great influence.

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI (1879-1950)

Sri Ramana Maharshi was an authentic model of the Advaita Vedanta spirituality and one of the most famous holy men of modern times. At the age of seventeen, while a student at the American Mission High School in Madurai, he first became troubled by awareness of his own mortiality, and in a trance he received assurance of his identity with a spirit immune to death. He ran away to the holy mountain where Siva is said to have revealed himselt in the infinite lingam, and there he remained quietly for the rest of his life. His disciples built him an asrama (religious retreat), and aspirants from both East and West came to share the silence of his meditation hall and to receive, rarely, brief words of counsel. His doctrine was that of Sankara. He was willing to allow some of his disciples to attempt the difficult eight-stage yoga, but his advice to most was merely to suppress conceptual thinking and to pursue introspectively the question "Who am I?" By following their consciousness inward to its source they would discover the soul, or universal atman.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

A far more aggressive promoter of the Advaita out-look than Ramana Maharshi is Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who at the time of this writing is still alive. His organization, the Students' International Meditation Society, has trained thousands of Westerners in a simple form of Hindu meditation. Mahesh Yogi has removed the aura of exoticism that formerly surrounded yoga. His extraordinary impact on Europe and America is based on his success in establishing many meditation centers and on his willingness to allow yoga to be used for the attainment of emotional equilibrium and physical health—values long, appreciated in the West.

Ramakrishna Paramanamsa (1836-1886)

This many-faceted holy man has had a great influence on the course of modern Indian cultural history. Little concerned with Western ideas, Ramakrishna was a man of visions who was familiar with many kinds of trances and apparitions. He was born of poor brahman parents in rural Bengal and lived for most of his adult life in a temple of the goddess Kali near Calcutta. As a young man he agonized over the death of his father and of many protectors and patrons and fell into a despair approaching madness. He appealed to Kali to give him some token of her regard, and on one dark day he snatched a sword from the temple wall, intending to commit suicide by offering the goddess his life's blood. At that moment, Ramakrishna later reported, the goddess emerged from her image in an ocean of light and enveloped him in wave after wave of her love. This experience ended his fears; he became a composed and effective teacher.

Although Ramakrishna was a person of Sakta outlook and a devotee of Kali, he also had visions of many other Hindu deities, and he experienced mystical trances of the Advaita type in which personal deities had no role.

At various times Ramakrishna had visions of Christ and of Muhammad. These led him to believe that the had fully understood Islam and Christianity and that he had found them to be

mystical religions of Hindu type. He concluded that they were valid faiths. Ramakrishna therefore taught the unconditional equality of all religions, a position from which his followers later withdrew. Ramakrishna's vivid testimony to direct religious experiences fascinated the educated Hindus of his time and drew back into traditional Hinduism many who had belonged to the half-Western cults.

Svami Vivedananda (1863-1902)

Foremost among Ramakrishna's disciples was Vivekananda, who organized an order of monks, the Ramakrishna Order, to carry on the master's teaching. Vivekananda had a university education and shared the patriotic feeling and social concern of India's Englich-educated elite.

In dedicating itself in India to works of social service, the Ramakrishna Order has proposed by its example a new activist ideal for the life of the sannyasi. The monks carry out relife work at times of famine and flood, and operate excellent hospitals and clinics. In doctrine the continuing disciples of Ramakrishna follow the Advaita Vedanta teaching, not exactly as taught by Sankara, but with a modified understanding of maya that permits accept ance of the world as real. In interpreting Ramakrishna's religious life, Vivekananda and other scholars of the order ignored Ramakrishna's preference for a personalitic worship of Mother Kali and understood Ramakrishna to have been above all a great exemplar of the mysticism and the doctrine of a world-accepting Advaita Vedanta.

For many educated Hindus, this Neo-Vedanta outlook has provided a new national rallying point in religion. It permits many modern Hindus to see other religions and types of religious experience as valid as far as they go, but as incomplete insights that must be completed and corrected in the end in the Advaita experience of absolute Oneness. The adherents of this view are able to recognize and yet subordinate all other forms of Hindu faith.

The Ramakrishna Order's perception of its monism as the ultimate religion, fulfilling the aspirations of other useful but provisional

faiths has be come the basis for a Hindu mission to the world. In 1893 Vivekananda represented Hinduism effectively at a World Parliament of Religions in Chicago and remained to organize Vedanta centers and to make himself the first great Hindu missionary to the West. In the United States at present there are eleven centers of the Ramakrishna Mission, which instruction is given in Hindu meditative disciplines and where the modernized Advaita Vedanta philosophy is taught. The resident missionaries do not understand themselves to be making converts to Hinduism, but to be recalling the adherents of Western religions to the neglected monistic spirituality that has always been the hidden center of all faiths.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975)

As a student, Radhakrishnan became an admirer of Vivekananda's modernized Vedianta, and in his mature years he developed its concepts to a new level of sophistication. He broadened its following greatly through his lucid books and worldwide lecturing. This gifted professor perceived in the Hindu tradition's sense of the oneness of all beings in the Absolute a metaphysical basis for binding together the Indian nation and eventually all humanity. He believed that Hinduism had a mission to communicate its more mature understanding of this heading unity to peoples elsewhere who in general understand this truth of Oneness less well. He anticipated that the existing religions of the world would eventually dissolve into a new monistic faith that would bring to perfection India's historic spiritual insight. In the eyes of some modern Hindus, Radhakrishan's Neo-Vedanta teaching has become the new Hindu doctrinal orthodoxy.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)

Sri Aurobindo was born in Bengal and educated in England at Cambridge University, where he became a master of classical and modern European languages. Returning to India, he joined Tilak's nationalist movement and was imprisoned in 1910 for his role in inspiring an outbreak of violence in Bengal. During his confinement he underwent a mystical experience that changed his values. After his release he took refuge in the French enclave of

Pondicherry and gave up his formerly Western lifestyle. He spent the rest of his life in seclusion there. practicing yogic meditation and writing in English. In the last twently five years of his life he did not even once descend the stairs from his upper room.

Aurobindo's interpretation of the universe, though it is substantially Indian in its universe, though it is substantially Indian in its concepts, includes much from the evolutionst thought of the nineteenth-century West. In Aurobindo's view of history, the world, totally real in its essence, has progressed by stages from an original condition in which nothing but matter existed. In the second stage, life appeared, and in the third and current stage, the mind emerged. The next step in evolution is now producing a higher state of consciousness in the appearance of superminds and superhumans. Thurough absolute mental surrender to God and through the perfection of conciousness in yoga, persons of our time can develop a transrational awareness of Sakti, the descending force of the divine in its cosmic acitivity.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

Tagore was a great poet, writing in both Bengali and English, who felt the need to express his personal faith in his verse. The son of Debendranath Tagore he preserved from his family's Brahmo Samaj tradition its belief in a personal God. but in time, he quielty moved away from the Brahmo Samaj's rationalism to mystical faith. Awareness of the divine presence came to him, however, not in the course of introversions like those of the traditional eight-stage yoga, but in moments of living contemplation of the beauty of nature and of living beings. His compassionate view of life is beautifully expressed in his famous booklet of poems entitled *Gitanjali* (A handful of song offerings). for which he recieved the Nobel Prize. A cosmopolitan man with a distaste for the cultural and religious jealousies of his time. Tagore expressed in his poems, in universal language, a personal Hindu outlook that has worldwide appeal.

For many centuries Hinduism, as both the creator and the servant of a little-changing society consisting of castes of unequal privilege, devoted itself to helping people to be content while living

in a world that accommodated itself very little to individuals' desires. In modern times this highly specialized religious tradition has shown a remarkable and unexpected ability to generate new forms of religion in response to new attitudes and new and different social problems. For almost two centuries, talented Hindu religious leaders have been attempting to sweep away major parts of the world and world view of the Hindu past. As a result of their efforts, Hinduism is no longer committed to a defense of medieval cosmologies, prescientific approaches to nature, or the privileges of an ancient aristocracy.

Contemprary studies of young Hindus show that through few are well trained in their religious tradition, most are glad to identify themselves as Hindus. Educated Hindus continue to undergo traditional religious experiences. Millions still go on pilgrimages. New temples are being built all over India. The round of family rituals continues in villages and cities with modest adaptations to the altered circumstances of modern life. Hinduism appears to have been as successful as other religions in surviving in the midest of change.

Mohini (*illusion*)

Minor incarnation of Visnu. Hindu (Epic and Paranic). Mohini is an *avatara* who appears in the form of an enchantess whose form Visnu adopted briely to deceive demons attempting to remove the ambrosia created by churning the primeval ocean of milk (see also Garuda) seduce the god Siva.

Mohini Attam Dance of the Sorceress

Mohini literally means a "bewitching woman". It is a name of Vishnu in the guise of a woman beautiful, enchanting and appealing who seduced the Ashuras to regain the Amrita for the gods on the occasion of the Churning of the Milky Ocean. While the Ashuras were quarelling among themesives as to who should drink of it first, Mohini appeared there. They forgot about Amrita and gazed and gazed only at her. They gave the urn of Amrita to her to apportion it among them. She entranced and cheated them all by giving the whole of it to the gods..Similarly she helped Sniva in

destroying the demon Bhasmasura. Mahini infatuated him by her beauty par excellence and made him dance after her entrancing him to a stance which caused his destruction. It is a dance of an enchantress who causes havoc and destruction to the wicked and great delight and pleasure to the good. Thus, Mohini stands for a kind of delusion, enchantment or infatuation resulting from the vision of a dazzling beauty. Mohini Attam is a dance style named after this mythological beauty, because it is a solo performance given by a woman alone and reigns supreme in grace, enchantment and pure aesthetic pleasure.

Mohini Attam is one of the two major dance-dramas of Kerala. Not unlike Kathakali, it has witnessed its moon-like phases of waxing and vaning. Mohini Attam is a kind of synthesis of Kathakali, Bharata Natyam, and a few folk dances of the region like Kaikottibali and Kummi. After the death of Maharaja Swati Tirunal of Travancore in 1847, Mohini Attam went into rapid eclipse, decline and degradation. It would have died its natural death by now had it not been revived by the dedicated efforts of Kerala Kalamandala established in 1930.

Mohini Attam commences with the opening dance called Cholkettu. The danscuse stands with the feet and legs apart, knees bent and spread out and hands raised over the head in anjali in salutation. She begins at average tempo but gradually gains speed with the passage for pure dance sequence leading to the climax containing interchangin expressional and pure dance sequences to the accompaniment of vocal and instrumental music. It presents a perfect combination of abhinaya, nritta and nritya to evoke rasa or flavour. The musician sings the poem narrating the theme of divine love and the danseuse interprets it with her skilled footwork, movements of the hands, and expressional face and eyes. It is a dance-style specially marked for its grace, fluidity, simple looking footwork and rotating rhythmic movements. It is also characterized by a graceful and easy rise and fall of the torso without breaking the vertcal line of the body. They dancer has to colaesce one move ment with the other so that there is no sense of jerk and everything continues smoothly and softly to the accompaniment of cymbals, veena, madala, chenda and obviously the vocal music of the

conductor as *nattuvanar.*

As in Kathakali, a tall massive brass lamp fed with coconut oil is always there on the stage occupying a pride of place. The dancer has her face painted in a natural tint with eyebrows and eyes well elongated to heighten her beauty and grace, and then there is a large red-dot in the centre on the forehead. The costume is always white or creamwhite comprising a sari and a matching blouse. The other adorments include various ornaments and ankle bells and a spray of jasmine flowers in the hair tied into a bun behind the head.

Morva

Sky spirits. Andaman Islands [Sea of Bengalj. Invisible but thought to be human form.

Mrgasiras (*head of a gazelle*)

Minor goddess of fortune. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A benevolent naksatra; daughter of Daksa and wife of Candra (Soma).

dMu-bdud Kam-Po Sa-Zan

Sky god. Bon [Tibet]. The head of the ancient pantheon in the Bon religion.

Mucalinda

Tutelary god. Buddhist. The guardian of a lake near Bodh Gaya. He is identified as a king of the nagas or snake gods and is said to have protected the Buddha from a storm by coiling around him.

Mula

Minor goddess of fortune. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A malevolent naksatra: daughter of Daksa and wife of Candra (Soma).

Munisvara

Deified saint. Hindu. Technically a demi-god but worshipped as a deity by Dravidians in southern India. Also Municami (Tamil).

Muraja

Goddess of music. Buddhist. Deification of a kind of large drum or tambourine. Colour: smoky. Attribute: tambourine.

Murukan

Hunting and war god. Dravidian and Tamil [southern India]. Identified with the Hindu god Skanda. His vehicle is an elephant or a peacock. Colour: red. Attributes: spear and staff with garland.

Mysterious "Brahman"

There is nothing in Hinduism more mysterious than Brahman. Brahman means "The one without a second". Of all the names given to God in scriptures, Bralman is the most obscure. In the upanishads, Brahman is the Absolute one which makes all things known. According to Advaita philosophy, Brahman alone is real, all the rest is unreal and illusion or Maya. Trying to understand Brahman with a human mind is like trying to look at the eye with which one sees everything. To know Brahman, one must experience one's oneness with the Brahman through one of the methods of God— realization. In the Upanishads, Neti-Neti (not this—not this) is the method by which Brahman is explained.

"Brahman" and "Atman" are actually one and the same. The individual soul within the body is known as Self or Atman. It is also known as Jiyatman. The soul that is bound by Karmas is known as Atman. When that soul breaks loose from the bondage of Karmas, then it attains salvation or becomes one with Brahman or Paramatman. To give you an approximate example, I should say that if the electricity in your computer can be called Atman, then the total electrical energy in the entire utility network is Brahman. As I told you before, by no means will you be able to understand these words with your mind since we are talking about things far above and beyond the mind.

Well, it is erroneous to make a definition like that since God is beyond any definitions and the concept of understanding or realizing Him is above the mind. Even so I should say that that almost all the time God acts as if God is energy, complying with the unwritten laws of the universe. These unwritten laws act in a similar manner all the time. A newborn baby who touches a live conductor of electricity gets an electric shock, so too the scientist who may have done 20 years of research on electricity alone. The

energy concept of God makes God in tune with modern science. The laws of Newton, Maxwell, and Einstein suddenly become as religious as the Code of Manu or the Upanishads. The latest researches into Alpha, Beta and Gamma brain waves also give us a correlation between Happiness and Brain waves. In one of the books written on Raja Yoga, it is said that all happiness and realization lie in the head, so try to tap the vast resources of happiness in the head by meditation.

The Raja Yoga, Mantras, Tantras, and the existence of the coiled Kundalini power, Chalkras and Auras point towards the direction of energy. The energy concept is seen in the Holy Bible too. Anyway all those who knew God never defined God, so we cannot conclude that God is energy or something else, but the *energy concept of God* is a good topic for discussion.

Mythology

Mythology, as the word's meaning goes, is the "logic of myth". So, there could be instances where certain things contradict themselves in mythology. When someone looks at Hinduism, he should look at the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads and Raja Yoga, and then ask questions regarding them. Anyway, I shall try to explain to you mythological concepts as clearly as I can.

To begin with, Lord Krishna is God in the flesh. not an ordinary human being. Secondly, Sage Narada himself felt that Krishna was a polygamist. One day, he went to the 16,008 houses. and Narada saw Krishna performing household duties in every house. From that observation he came to the conclusion that Krishna is a monogamist, and the supreme being.

There is also another explanation about Krishna and his wives. most of whom are Gopis. "Love of Gopis for Krishna" is a symbolism of "the craving of Jivatman—individual soul—to merge with Paramatman (Absolute sould)." Here Gopis represent Jivatman (individual soul) and Krishna represents (Paramatman). To an ordinary man who reads songs of Swami Jayadeva, it will sound an exaggeration, but actually they are the symbolism of the Jivatma- Paramatma union.

"Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah"—Non-violence is the highest virtue — is written for the ordinary man. Of course, Mahatama Gandhi use it effectively as a weapon against the British in India. But gods act on a different plane altogether. Their actions are not motivated by anger, greed or selfishness. They act in a very mathematical and logical manner. Just look at the way Lord Rama killed demon Ravana. Rama did that without any kind of anger. He could have transformed Ravana, but on the part of Ravana he was looking forward to death at the hands of Rama, so that he could achieve salvation. To give you another example, let us say, you put your hand in fire. You get burnt. You cry with pain. But the fire did not have any particular desire to hurt you. It is its nature to burn. Gods act in the same way. When they kill a demon, they do that without anger. They could convert the demon, but still they prefer to kill, because the demon's actions warrant pain for his body in this world. Here we go back to the Law of Karma, again. Remember the crucifixion of Christ. A person who can distribute seven loaves of bread to thousands could have easily converted all his enemies. Still Christ chose to suffer the agony on the cross. Why? To obey the Law of Karma which requires Pleasure and Pain for the body.

You know very well that it is very difficult to answer questions on mythology using logic and reason. For example, how on earth can anybody explain Lord Ganapati (elephant headed God) using a tiny mouse as his vehicle? How can any body explain the 10 heads of Ravana and one thousand heads of the serpent Ananta? Science cannot still tackley. The problems of the Siamese twins let alone 10 or 1000 heads on the body. It is indeed funny to hear people criticise Lord Rama for giving up his beloved consort princess Sita. They know that by no means are they going to get any astisfactory answer on that question but still this type of criticism of mythology lingers on. Mythological stories may have been written with very high ideological meanings but unluckily with our very limited knowledge, we cannot understand them.

With the aid of modern science we may be able to understand things like Brahmastra (as nuclear missiles), Krishna's *Sudarshana Chakra* (as a kind of strategic defence initiative weapon with great offensive capabilities SDI), the story of the birth of Lord Hanuman,

where Goddess Parvati transferred her pregnancy to the wife of the God of Air (surrogate motherhood), four sons of Queen Kunti Devi (as test-tube babies), 100 sons of Queen Gandhari (she did not use a test-tube, she used big earthenware pot) and *Pushpaka Vimana* (a helicopter) and so on. Of course, all these are speculations and as such we are all better off using mythology to strictly understand the unwritten laws of the universe. Arguing on mythological stories is the erroneous act of all and as such all arguments should be avoided.

N

Nagakumara

God. Jain [India]. One of the groups under the general title of *bhvanavasi* (dwelling in places). They have a youthful appearance and are associated with rain and hunder.

Nagaraja

Snake god. Hindu. The generic title of a deity equating with the terms *mahoraga* (great serpent) or *nagadeva.* Such deities were worshipped in Inda as early as the Indus Valley civilization (prior to 1700 BC.

Nagini

Goddess. Jain [India]. The counterpart of the Hindu goddess Manasa.

Naigameya

God. Hindu. Either the son or the brother of the god Skanda. Generally depicted with the head of a goat.

Nairamata (*no soul*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An emanation of Aksobhya. A Sakti of Heruka and a personification of knowledge. She bears five or six arms in different gestures and often stands upon a corpse. Colour: blue or black. Attributes: arrows, club, cup and knife. Three-eyed.

Naksatra (s)

Generic title for a group of astral goddesses. Hindu. Stars or

constellations which became personified as deities, accounted as twenty-seven daughters of Daksa and consorts of Candra or Soma. They can exert benign or evil influence.

Namaṣangiti (*the chanting of the name*)

God. Buddhist. A form of Avalokitesvara, but also a distinat emanation of Vairocana. The personification of a sacred text. He stands upon a lotus. Colour: white. Attributes: club, lotus, sword, half-sfaff and water-jar.

Nandi(n) (*rejociing*)

Bull god. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). Generally associated with Siva as a bull-vehicle and an emobdiment of fertility. Colour: white. The image usually stands in an anteroom of the temple guarding the place where the statue of Siva is located. A Siva devotee touches the image's testicles on entry to a shrine. In anthropomorphic form he may be known as Nandisa.

Nang Lha

House god. Tibetan. A personal family guardian depicted with the head of a pig. He is propitated with libations.

Nan-Sgrub (*the black one*)

God. Buddhist [Tibet]. Possibly a counterpart of the Hindu god Ḳala. In Lamaism he is a form of Yama. He stands upon a man. Colour: dark blue. Attributers: cup and knife.

Nappinnai

Local goddess. Hindu-Dravidian (Tamil). Consort of Krsna. Mentioned in the Vaisnavite and Saivite literature, the Krsna-Nappinnai cult was prominent in Tamil-speaking areas of southern India in the seventh to ninth centuries. According to tradition Kṛisna wed Nappinnai after a bull-baiting contest during which he took on and defeated seven bulls. Nappinnai may be a localized form of Sri-Laksmi Also Pinnai.

Nara (*man*)

Minor incarnation (s) of the god Visnu. Hindu (Epic and Puranic).

Some authorities place these as separate *avataras*, but they are usually linked. Two of the sons of Dharma, who was born from the heart of Brahma, they spent a thousand years as severe ascetics in the Himalaya, where they were subject to various temptations by India. They are described as sages. The texts depict Nara coloured green and bearing two hands, whilst Narayana has four hands and is coloured blue. They may also be paralleled by Hari and Krsna. Also Narayana.

Narad (*giver of advice*)

Minor but popular deity. Hindu (Vedic, Epic and Puranic). Narada is depicted as a sage who is also a messenger and teacher. Born from the head, or throat, of Brahma, and alternatively a minor incarnation of Visnu. In various roles he is a guardian deity of women, a musician and a wanderer. Narada, often bearded, is generally depicted standing with the musical instrument which is his invention, the *vina* (lute). By contrast to his benign nature he is also described as a 'maker of strife' and as 'vile'. Also Kali-karaka; Pisuna.

Narad

Narad, and easily recognizable figure with a lute in one hand and a pointed and knotted tuft of hair in the centre of the otherwise clean-shaven scalp, plays a subsidiary but very important role in numerous mythological stories and religious scriptures of the Hindus.

According to Mahabharat Narad was the son of Kashyap and his mother was one of the daughters of Daksha. Another account says that he sprang from the forehead of Brahma. According to some Purans he frustrated the scheme of his father-in-law, Daksha, to people the earth with his five thousand sons. He advised the sons to choose the path of asceticism and not lead a worldly life. Daksha wanted his children to help in the work of creation and he became very angry. Daksha was going to curse Narad but was pacified by Bhahma.

Narad figures in Mahabharat and Krishna stories as the seer who foretold the death of king Kans at the hands of Krishna. In religious

books and other legends there come numerous references to Narad, though these denote time lag of centuries. Shankaracharya, the great Hindu philosopher of the eighth century A.D. explains this anomaly by stating that such perfected beings and gods, though freed from the bonds of ignorance and illusion, continue their appearances again and again for completion of their divine missions, assigned to them from age to age.

Narad is also named as Kapivaktra or monkey-faced. This episode makes an interesting study of how God curbs the Ahamkar (pride) of even the best of seers. It mentions that once Narad's mediation could not be disturbed even by Kama Dev (the god of lust). At this victory Narad was overwhelmed by a feeling of pride unbecoming of a seer Vishnu decided to teach him a lesson by humbling his pride. He created an illusory kingdom and a most beautiful princess. In fact princess was the incarnation of Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu. When Narad reached the territory of this king, he was told that the beautiful princess is to marry the prince of her choice shortly and preparations were on for that marriage ceremony. Narad saw that beautiful princess and immediately fell in love with her. He approached Shiv to seek his adbice how to attain the hand of that maiden. Lord Shiv led him to Vishnu saying that he should borrow the face of Vishnu, after which the princess could never resist the beauty of that face and would put the garland of marriage around the neck of Narad.

Narad went to Vishnu and requested that he be given a face as beautiful as that of Vishnu so as to attract the princess. Vishnu played a trick and gave the face of a monkey to Narad. Not knowing what had happened, Narad reached the court of that King. So many other princes had also assembled there to solicit the hand of princess. The princess entered the hall of marriage with a flower garland in hand. Narad was sure that with the handsome face that he had got, the princess would choose him as thecompanion of life. But to his utter dismay and great astonishment, the princess did not even look twice at his face of a monkey. Suddenly Lord Vishnu also appeared in the court and the princess put the garland around his neck.

Narad then had a look at his monkey-face in pool of water and became mad with rage. He cursed Vishnu proclaiming that Vishnu would, during his sojourn on earth, have to bear the pangs of his wife's forcible separation from him and only a monkey would be able to relieve him of his sufferings. Thus Vishnu was born as Ram and had to take the help of Hanuman to free Sita from the clutches of Ravan.

In Devi Bhagwat Puran a story comes where Narad desires to know from Vishnu the secret and nature of Maya (the illusion). Vishnu led Narad to a lake and asked him to take a bath. Narad found himself transformed into a female and though such a great seer he forgot who he really was. He as a female started taking his life as such and married a King called Taladhvaj. He also gave birth to sons and took pride in his family. Suddenly Vishnu dispelled this illusion and brought back Narad to the realm of reality. Narad thereby learnt what power Maya has over man.

Narad is shown as a wandering seer going from one place to another. This is the result of a curse, whereby he was condemned to lead a roaming life not staying at one place. He is reputed to have invented Vina. the principal stringed instrument of India and is deemed to be the leader of the celestial musicians. He is famous as a mischief-maker and in India his name is taken as a symbol of a person who is always creating one or the other type of light mischief for gods and goddesses.

The authorship of several hymns of Rig Veda is ascribed to him and he is the author of Naradiya Dharam Shastra, a great work on law and moral conduct.

Naradatta (*daughter of Nara*)

Goddess of learning. Jain [India]. One of sixteen *vidyadevi* headed by the goddess Sarasvati.

Narasinha (*man-lion*)

Incarnation of the Vindu (Epic and Puranic). The fourth avatara of the god is depicted as a man-lion hybrid. According to legend. the demonic king Hiranyakasipu had taken on a dangerous

invulnerability. To thwart this. Visnu took the form of Narasinha and hid inside a pillar of the king's palace whence he sprang, capturing Hiranyakapiu and tearing out his entrail. Iconographically, the seene is portrayed with the victim thrown across Narasinha's lap and the god's claws plunged into his body. Narasinha may also appear seated in a yoga position with the goddess Laksmi on his knce.

Narayana

Creator god. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). More or less synonymous with Visnu, but specifically describing the embodiment of the 'abode of man'. He is said to have sucked his toe whilst sailing the primeval ocean on banana leaf, until his own inspiration created the world. Often depicted supported by the bird god Garuda. See also Nara.

Narsingh

Narsingh, the fourth incarantion of god Vishnu, is half-lion half-human and provides a very fascinating study of Lord's incarnation in order to alleviate the sufferings of devotees. The story runs thus.

Among descendants of Daksh, the first man that Brahma created, there was one Kashyap, a sage, who had four wives, Diti, Aditi, Vinita and Kudroo. Diti gave birth to demons and from Aditi were born gods, while from Vinita was born Gurud, the carrier of Vishnu and the last one Kudroo created the hydras.

Out of the demons born of Diti, two were with terrific powers. These two brothers were named Hiranyaksh and Hianyakashyapu. Both of them performed so many religious practices and austerities that in course of time they gained limitlers powers. Brahma was so pleased with their penances that he bestowed on Hiranyakashyapu the priceless boon of immortality with these words: on common human being or god could destory him, that he would not die either in the day or in the night, neither in earth nor in heaven, and he would not be killed by any weapon, or by water or fire.

After this blessing the two demons crossed all bounds in oppression and even dethroned Indra, the king of heavens. Indra in the

company of all the gods appeared before Brahma and prayed for deliverance. Brahma was very much worried and replied that the two demons had become powerful due to the blessings bestowed by him in Hiranyakashyapu and how could he destoy them! He also advised Indra to got to Vishnu, which they did. To Vishnu these gods retold their story of sufferings and said that due to boons given by Brahma the two demons had been indulging in all sorts of oppression. Vishnu promised to destroy them in due course of time.

Hiranyakashyapu had a son named Prahlad. This boy right from his very childhood was attracted towards Vishnu and other gods. Prahlad had not obeyed the orders of his father not to worship Vishnu. His father tried to destory his son in fits of anger; typing a stone to Prahlad's body he was thrown in the river but Vishnu himself came and stopped him from drowning and dying. Hiranyakashyapu later tried to get Prahlad trampled under the feet of an elephant but the elephant lifted Prahlad lovingly by the help of his trunk and put him on its back. He then built a house and putting Prahlad into it set the same to fire; even this could not harm Prahlad. The father even tried to poison the son but to no avail.

At last one day he shouted and asked Prahlad, "You repeat Vishnu's name day in and day out; where does this god live? Prahlad mildly replied that He was present everywhere. The father asked, Is that Vishnu present in this pillar also? ' Prahlad replied, "Yes, very much." Hiranyakashypu shouted, "See, I will kill him then". He gave the pillar a heavy blow with his mace and a surprise resulted. The brickpillar burst open and Vishnu, in the form of a being half-man and half-lion came out of it. This was the reincarnation as Narsingh.

The shape of this god incarnate was neither of a man nor of a god nor of an animal. This god was not born of the womb in ordinary course. The time of appearance was also evening, when it was neither day nor night. The demon was bodilylifted and placed by Narsingh on his knees, which was between the earth and the sky. The god tore the demon's body with his claws-thus using no weapon of any kind. This way the blessings of Brahma were not overruled. After killing Hiranyakashyapu Narsingh also killed his

other demon brother.

Prahlad was in tears and asked Narsingh about the fate of his father in the after-life. Vishnu assured the devotee that as He, the Lord himself had killed the father, the latter would surely go to heaven. Vishnu also gave a blessing to Prahlad that now onwards none of his race would die by the hands of Vishnu.

Nataraja (*lord of the dance*).

Form of the god Siva. Hindu (Puranic). Emerging from 1200 AD onwards, this form depicts Siva as 'lord of the dance' ringed by fire and with one foot on a demon in the form of a black dwarf. Nataraja arguably epitomizes the moving power in the cosmos. Largely seen in southern Indian bronzes which display the dance-form *anandatandava.*

Natha

Tutelary god. Buddhist [Sri Lanka]. One of four local emanations of the *bodhisattva* Avalokitesvara.

Navadurga(s)

Generic title of a group of deites. Hindu the nine forms of the god Durga. The common vehicle is a chariot shaped like a lotus. Each carries a wide assortment of attributes.

Navasakti(s)

Generic title of a group of goddesses. Hindu. The nine *mataras* or mothers. In southern India they are considered virgin goddesses and are held in higher esteem that the comparable group of *saptamataras.*

Nediyon

Creator god. Early Dravidian (Tamil) [southern India]. Equates with a syncretization of Visnu and Krsna. The name implies a deity of tall stature. Sangam texts describe him wearing a golden robe. Arributes: conch, prayer wheel and lotus. Also Neduvel.

Niladanda

God. Buddhist. A *dikpala* or guardian deity of the south-western

quarter. Colour: blue. Attributes: jewel, lotus staff, sword and trident.

Niladevi (*black goddess*)

Consort of the god Visnu. Hindu (Puranic). Mentioned only in the *Vaikhanasagama* text as the third wife of Visnu, no art representation of this goddess has been discovered. She may be identical with the goddess Pinnai known in Tamil-speaking regions.

Nilalohita

God. Hindu. One of the *ekadasarudras* or eleven forms of the god Rudra.

Nirrti (*destruction*)

1. Destructive goddess of darkness. Hindu (Vedi and Puranic). Known chiefly from the Rg-veda, Nirrti has a generally malignant aspect and is associated with pain, misfortune and death. She is believed to live in the south (the land of the dead). She is dark skinned, wears dark dress and receive's the 'dark husks' of sacrifice, She is feared by many Hindus, whose offerings are frequent and repeated. In later Hinduism, Nirrti changes sex and becomes a dikpala god of terrifying appearance, guarding the south-western quarter, he has various consorts including Davi, Kalika and Krsnangi. He stands upon a lion, a man or a corpse. Attributes: javelin, shield, staff, sword and teeth. 2. God Buddhist. A dikpala or guardian. Colour: blue. Stands upon a corpse. Attributes: shield and sword.

Nrtya (*dance*)

Mother goddess. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. One of the astamataras. Colour: green or various. Attribute: staff.

O

Oddissi

Odissi, the essence of Orissa, is the highly inspired, impassioned, ecstatic and sensuous form of dance. Orissa, ever washed by the blue waters of the Bay of Bengal in the east, possessed of extensive palm-fringed coastline, proncounced sylvan environs, captivating blue hills, green wood-lands, ancient rock- caves, so fascinating sculptured temples, colourful and blithe trivals, a veritable miniature India, is the homeland of Odissi. Not unlike Bharata Natyam. Odissi was performed in the temples of Orissa as a religious rite and offering by the devadasis known as Maharis. Thus, Odissi is a ruch and generous cultural gift of the land, well known for its dedication to religion and arts and known in the past as Kalinga Desha. The people of this land raised magnificent temples, each erected as an act of praver and embellished by the skills of master craftsmen, sculptors and archtects. These became the centre of art and culture and it was here that Odissi. one of India's scintillating dance-forms was born, nurtured and nourished.

The institution of Maharis was a pronounced feature of the contemporary Orissan life and society. The maidens of the gods were ritually married to the presiding deity of the temple and thereafter they served as wife and handmaid. and danced during ritual worships and ceremonies. As a wedded wife and servat of the god, a Mahari was supposed to have partaken the divinty of the deity, and so was heldd in great respect. Only the extraordinarilv talented and beautiful girls were chosen to act as Devadasis or Maharis. They were as seductive as rich in their qualities of the heart and the head. The institution of Maharis was highly evolved

and sanctioned by the society. Epitome of female beauty and grace, and endowed with great skills in dance and music, they were really terrestrian nymphs and *Apsaras.*

Jayadeva of *Ashtrapadi* fame loved with all his heart and soul such a *Mahari* named Padma. She, a daughter of a Brahman, was a dancing girl dedicated to the famous temple of Lord Jajannath at Puri in Orissa. Jayadeva composed the lyrics of his poem *Gitagovinda* and she danced and performed them. According to a legend mentioned by Barbara Stoller Miller: "In the process of writing the poem, Jayadeva conceived the climax of Krishna's supplication to Radha as a command for Radha to place her foot on Krishan's head in a symbolic gesture of victory. But the poet hesitated to complete the couplet, in deference to Krishna. He went to bathe and in his absence Krishna appeared in his guise to write the couplet; then Krishna ate the food that Padmavati had prepared for Jayadeva and left. When Jayadeva returned, he realized that he had received divine grace in exalting Krishna's loving relation to Rakha.

"Place your foot on my head—
A sublime flower destroying poison of love!
Let your foot quell the harsh sun
Burning its fiery form in me to torment love.
Radha, cherished love.
Abandon your baseless pride!
Love's fire burns my heart—
Bring wine in your lotus mouth!

This graceful loving coaxing
Mura's foe spoke to Radhika
Triumphs in the joy Jayadeva sings
To delight his muse Padmavati.
Radha cherished love.
Abandon your baseless pride!
Love's fire burns my heart—
Bring wine in your lotus mouth!"

It may be noted that Jayadeva shared his name with Krishna, and his love Padma with Radha. *Ashtapadi* or *Gitagovinda* is a liquid

lyrical composition in Sanskrit which expresses highly impassionate love of Krishna for Radha and vice versa. It is an embodiment of the complexities of divine and human love at its best. Its songs are performed and danced everyday during ritual worship in the Jagannatha Temple at Puri. These form an integral part of various classical Indian dance-recitals including Bharata Natyam, Kathakali, and others and are an essential part of Odissi. These are sung by the devout and the secular with great reverence throughout the length and breadth of the country. It has been the subject of painting, poetry and many theatrical forms. Its sweeping impact and influence on Indian arts has been far reaching.

Besides *Maharis*, young and handsome bodys were also employed in these temples. They were called *Gotipuas* dressed in costumes as girls danced and sang in the temples and in the public in ceremonies. The Orissan temples had attached to them an assembly hall (*Jagmohan*), a dancing hall (*Natmandir*) and a hall of offerings (*Bhogmandir*). In the dancing hall were performed the dances, dramas and music sessions on ceremonial occasions besides regular dancing and singing before the deity. The temple walls, studded with sculptures of dancing poses, singing stances and mithunas tell of the golden age of Indian classical dances, music and sculpture. They are from a distant past and yet not so distant at all in feelings and appeal. They are quite fresh, relevant and enchanting. They are massive, alive, full-blooded and sensuous. They belong to what has rightly been termed as the 'enchanted millennium of classical art''. Restrained, relaxed, rhythmic and real. they portrav an unbroken sequence of a dance recital to the accompaniment of music. For centuries together, the magnificent temples at Bhubaneshwar, Puri and Konark remained the focal point of religion and arts. The fundamental principles and purposes of a temple and an art are the same. They complemented each other. To quote from *the Eye of Love by Richards Lannoy*. ''a temple brings order to our indicidual lives and puts in harmony with universal laws. The rules of mathematical proportion, and layout of the images, have a rhythm and this rhythm, rather like Indian music. is conceived according to a science of moods. Even the poses of the figures carved on the temple are themselves based upon dance poses. dance rhythms to

evoke specific moods. Complex groups of images follow a rhythmic pattern across the wall surfaces like the intricate beat of Indian drums in development of classical raga. Bands of musicians are portrayed with drums, flutes and stringed instruments. Row upon row of sculptured figures sway to the rhythm of the dance, like fronds of a seaweed in response to the rhythm of the waves." These sculptures show all the varieties of dance poses and rhythmic movements arrested in stones. The balance struck between gay abandon and classical restrain the these figures is delicate and remarkable.

Rooted deeply in traditions and rituals, the dance is very old but the name is new. A few decades ago everything about it—the technique, style, its stages, the repertoire and the finale were almost amorphous, and we cannot say how exactly the Maharis danced in the past. And so the experts, *Maharis* and their *Acharyas* put their heads together, pondered over the matter and baptized it as "Odissi", the dance of Orissa They adapted the existing format of *Bharata Natyam* to suit it, and today it is a well established and codified classical dance-form of India, a dance of love, delight and intense passion, lyrical, pure, divine and human, all rolled into one.

Odissi dance commences with an invocation to gods and salutations to the Mother Earth, the elephant-headed god Ganesha or Vighneshawara, the Remover of the Obstacles and the teacher to the accompaniment of rhythmic vocal syllables (*Bani or Ukuttas*) blended into drum beats set to tal known as Ghali. The chant of the musicians in a particular raga, the rhythmic beat on the drum and the lilting and measured feet movements of the danseuse are so harmonized that they produce a fine balance between the dance and the dancer. and the spectators are ushered into a fascinating world of mime, music and motifs reflecting sculpture stances. Obviously Odissi is based on the Karnas, the basic alphabets of the language of hands and other limbs called Sthanaks here. The introductory piece is a fine example of short but sweet piece of pure and expressional dance. The dancer interprets the rhythmic syllables of the conductor with her *naynabhinaya*, gestures and rhythmic movement of the feet at a quicker speed. The prelude ends with the recitation of a Shloka in Sanskrit or Orissi and its fine

interpretation by the dancer reflecting a delicate balance between Nritta, pure dance; Nritya, expressional dance; Natya, combination of acting and dance; and then follows Pallavi, corresponding to Bharata Natyam's *Jatiswaram*. Here again we witness a fine blend of'pure dance and Natya. Pallavi comprises a sequences of pure dance pieces set to a dulcet singing of the dancer and its interpretation by facial and eye expressions. Ornate in nature, *Pallavi* is highly lyrical which familiarizes us with mood of the dance. Being so poetical and pleasing, there are more than two numbers set to a raga and tal. Usually these are from the Gitagovinda, underlining the passionate love of Krishna for the Cowherdess Radha, the symbolical representation of the human soul, everyeaning to be united with the Supreme Soul. Jayadeva's songs are as highly theatrical and lyrical as they are deeply erotic and philosophical. The number may be the very first song of the Ashtapadi on Dashavatra beginning with fish incarnation of Vishnu Or, it may be some other number from the same immortal lyrical poem. The expressional number is laced with some very fast dance sequences. It is a very evocatve item full of fine sculpturesque stances, scintillating footwork, a variety of dance patterns demanding a great command and technique on the part of the dancer, and finally leading to the climax of *Moksha. Moksha* corresponds to Bharata Natyam's Tillana. Moksha corresponds to Moksha literally means salvation, liberation, release or deliverance. It is a state of inexpressible equipoise, harmony, happiness and fulfilment when all duality ceases and a perfect identification dawns on the aspirant with the Brahman or Ishvara. This is the highest and purest state when one becomes pure attention and concentration. Here the dance and the dancer become one culminating into an all inclusive awareness, a fathomless deep consciousness where all thoughts are dissolved and fused into perfect harmony and equilibrium.

Odissi presents a fine synthesis of *Lasya* and *Tandava* styles of Indian classical dance. The dancer very quickly and cleverly changes from one to the other according to the need of the expressional number. rhythmic syllables and *abhinaya*. The dance numbers are either in Sanskrit or Orissi and the music is a combine

of Hindustani and Karnataka classical styles. The conductor chants the rhythmic syllables and plays the bronze cymbals. He is supported by another male vocalist, a drummer, playing on the pakhawaj and a flutist. Odissi is characterised by the stamping of the dancing foot and above all be Bhangas (stances) of the Indian sculpture. A *Bhanga* involves bending, bowing or stretching out of the body reflected well in "threeband" configuration of Indian sculpture. These *Bhangas* are employed to a great advantage to express different aspects and moods. Thus, they are charged with great emotional expressiveness. They are four in numbers -Sama *Bhanga, Abhanga Atibhanga* and *Tribhanga. Sambhanga* is an erect posture without any bend or bowing; *Abhanga* is staance with slight bend either side. The next two *Bhangas* are frequently employed in Odissi. In *Atibhanga* the upper part of the body above the waist is swayed rhythmically to the left and right alternately with arms stretched out to either side and knees bent. *Tribhanga* is a stance of three bends in which the legs are inclined opposite the direction of the torso, and the head bent in the direction of the legs. Actually no movement is possible without restoring to *Bhangas. Tribhangi Mudra* is traditionaly associated with Krishna while playing flute in a cross-leg stanging posture. Here the whole body weight is on one leg which is in contact with the ground and the other lifted up on toes and drawn away. By implication it means moving torso to the opposite direction of the legs and the head to maintain the balance. The human body has been divided into three distinct parts—the head, the torso and the body below the waist from dance and sculpture point of view. The dancing Shiva or Natraja is also in *Tribhanga.* The *Bhangas* help in attaining perfect body balance poise, curvatures and contours with the shifting of the weight. Tribhanga is a recurring stance of Odissi.

The performance and enjoyment of Odissi dance recital, at once so tender and vigorous, intensely erotic and devotional, moving and sculpturesque, is unique experience, a constant source of delight and inspiration. It is an idiom which transcends all the limits of communication leading to a rich aesthetic and spiritual experience both for initiated and popular but receptive spectators. Like the all time great Gitagovinda of Jayadeva, Odissi is also for ever and for

all the classes and the masses. Both are the jewels in the crown of the Indian art.

OM

The most sacred syllable, the first sound of the Almighty—the sound from which emerges each every other sound, whether of music or of language.

In the Upanishads this sacred syllable appears as a mystic sound, regarded by scriptures as the very basis of every other sacred mantra (hymn). It is the sound not only of origination but also of dissolution. The past, present and future are all included in this one sound and even all that transcends this configuration of time is also implied in OM.

According to Taitreya Upanishad the origin of language is assigned to Prajapati, from whose meditation on the three words arose the three Vedas and from his meditation arose the three syllables, *bhoor*, bhuva and suah, which represent earth, atmosphere and sky. From his meditation on these three originated the divine syllable of OM, which coordinated all speech and represented the totality of the world. They syllable OM also represents the trimurti (triad) of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv.

Shiv's drum produced this sound and through it came the notes of the octave, i.e., Sa, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni. Thus by this sound Shiv creates and recreates the universe. OM is also the sound form of Atman.

The Upanishads state that everything, existent and nonexistent, can be grasped by uttering the sacred syllable of OM. The psycho-therapic efficacy of OM is deemed limitless and its utterance redeems all errors in the performance of a sacrifice. Meditation on OM satisfies every need and ultimately leads to liberation. Nearly all the prayers and recitals of sacred passages are prefixed by the utterance of OM. Its equivalent is Omkar, venerated in the same manner and is thought to be the representation of God Himself.

Musically, it is also held that the term OM or AUM is made up by three base notes 'A' 'U' 'M' or the basic 'Sa' 'Pa' of the

fundamental scale and again Sa (the base note) of the immediately higher scale. When once pronounces these notes in continuity, all the basic notes from Sa to Ni also sound. Similarly when one pronounces AUM correctly, all the basic sounds also echo. It is believed to be the traditional way of clearing all the impediments in the vocal chord to make one chant the hymns correctly. Their unison makes one not only sound sonorous but also acts as the necessary preparation to chant a Mantra (Incantation) correctly. It is for this reason that all the Vedic Mantras has 'OM' or 'AUM' as the first term.

O-Iwa-Dai-Myojin

God of stoneworkers. Shinto and Buddhist [Japan]. Probably more a Buddhist deity, but also revered in Shintoism.

Ostaraki (*covering*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An attendant of Buddhakapala.

P

Padma (*lotus*)

1. Snake god. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of a group seven *mahanagas*. Attributes: rosary and water jar. Three-eyed.

2. Goddess. An incarnation of laksmi, the consort of an *avatara* of Visnu. She is depicted as emanating from the *padma* or lotus (*Nelumbium speciosum*) which is the symbol of creation and one of the most important iconographic devices in Hinduism. Also Kamala.

Padmantaka (*destructive to the lotus*)

God. Buddhist. A dikpala or guardian of the western direction. Colour: red. Attributes: jewel. red lotus, prayer wheel and sword. Three-headed.

Padmapani (*with lotus in hand*)

God. Buddhist. A *bodhisattva* or buddha-designate, and a distinct form of Avalokitesvara. Colour: white or red. Attributes: book, image of Amitabha on the crown. knot of hair, lotus, rosary, trident and water-jar. Three-eyed.

Padmatara (*lotus Tara*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana).

Padmosnisa

God. Buddhist. Apparently connected with the guardian deities or *dikpalas* and associated with the western direction. Colour: red.

Palaniyantavan

Local god. Hindu-Dravidian (Tamil). Known only from southern India and considered to be a form of Skanda or of Murukan, who is an old Tamil tribal snake god.

Pancabrahma

Collective name for five aspects of Siva. Hindu. The five aspects are Aghora, Isana, Sadyojata, Tatpurausa and Vamadeva. Also Isanadayas.

Pancamukha-Patradeva

God. Buddhist. A bowl-god'. Attributes: an alms bowl in each of sixteen hands. Five-headed.

Pancanana

Demonic deity. Hindu (Puranic). Regarded as a form of the god Siva possessing five faces, each face having three eyes. Depicted with the naked body of an ascetic, wearing a necklace of snakes. Shrines symbolize the god with a stone, its top painted red and usually placed beneath a tree. Pancanana is worshipped extensively in Hindu villages throughout Bengal where women make invocations and anoint the stones, particularly where sickness strikes. There is a belief that children in the throes of epilepsy have been seized by the god.

Pancaraksa (*five-fold protection*)

Group of goddesses. Buddhist. Five tutelary or guardian deities who personify protective spells or magic formulae. They are thus known as 'spell goddesses.'

Panchatantra & Artha Shastra

Panchatantra (Five Books is a collection of stories told by one wise man named Vishnusharman to a few princes to teach them about worldly affairs. Behind each story there is a moral, showing the exact course of action a wise man should undertake. It also teaches the science of statecraft and proper understanding of human nature.

In these stories, human vices are exposed through the characters of

animals. The leading part in the stories are played by two jackals, *Karataka* and *Damanaka*. It is said that this famous fable-book of ancient India was written during 200 B.C. One of the very good books on *Panchatantra*, is a translation by Arthur W. Ryder, University of Chicago Press, 1925. Another good translation was written by Mr. D. Ghosal namely Thirty-five stories from *Panchatantra*—Calcutta 1925.

Artha Shastra is the code of ethics for kings written by the saintly (!) prime minister of Mourya Dynasty, by name Kautilya or Chanakya. The literal word meaning of Kautilya is crookedness or Treachery. Artha Shastra is dedicated to Venus and Jupiter, deals with Nyaya, doctrine and Atharva Veda. Believe it or not, just like Deadsea Scrolls 1948 this scripture was discovered in 1905.

The book is divided into 15 books dealing with a large variety of political and social subjects. Apart from ruling the country properly, this book also teaches an efficient system of esplonage. It also teaches different methods of torturing the enemy. It deals with all kinds of bodily tortures, like flogging to death, water-tube torture and all kind of mutilation of organs and limbs. This is indeed the most cynical doctrine known to mankind. It is indeed the most ferocious criminal code.

Do the laws of Hinduism change from time to time? It used to be like that. The great Rishis who guided Hinduism from one age to another made all changes as per the need of the time.

So. does Hinduism allow the introduction of new laws? It allows not only the introduction of of new laws but also the production of new scriptures. Right now Hindu society has grown very big and unfortunately. most Hindus only know the mythological stories and a few lines from the Bhagvad Gita.

Does that mean Hinduism is a dead religion? Not at all. Since we do not know most of the scriptures does not mean that we are ignorant of the ideals and codes of Hinduism. Most Hindus practice Hinduism in their day-to-day life. Their family, social and professional lives are reflections of their practice of Hinduism, knowingly or unknowingly. Since we follow the Hindu Code of

Ethics, we have less stress and strain in our lives. I know son, you are very eager to ask me specific questions but let us go through the history and development of Hinduism first.

Pansahi Mata

Mother goddess. Hindu. A Sakti and one of seven saptamataras (mothers) who in later Hinduism became regarded as of evil intent, inflicting sickness on children under the age of seven. Particularly known from Bengla.

Pantheism and Polytheism

Hinduism is monistic and monotheistic in essence, but this essence often gets undermined by its apparent pantheism, polytheism and rich mythology. Hinduism at popular levels is pantheistic and henotheistic. With the passage of time many gods and goddesses of Vedic period were relegated to a secondary position in popular Hinduism, and many new ones came into existence. This plathora of deities of the Hindu pantheon, can be called a tribute to its rich imaginative and assimilative genius, but at the same time it also reflects its weakness, in the sense that in the multiplicity of gods and goddesses its true spirit of oneness of Reality is lost sight of. Popular Hinduism seems to emphasize immanance of Brahmana at the expanse of its transcendence. In the Vedic pantheon there were very many deities like Indra, Agni, Varuna, Mitra, Usha, Maruts, Ashvins, Rudra and others.

Hinduism finds the manifestation of divinity in practically every thing, specially in things which uphold, sustain and nourish life. For example, many manifestations of nature and its power like fire, wind and the sun personified as Agni, Marut and Surya respectively are held in high regard as gods because of the belief that they sustain and nourish life, and the succession of seasons, etc., is due to their powers. In the Vedas many collection of hymns are dedicated to these gods and goddesses. Many deities who earlier represented the various aspects of nature came to possess elaborate mythology with enthropomorphised them.

Hindu Trinity

The Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva or Mahesha marks the beginning of an epoch in the Hindutheism. Later it gave rise to distinct and main streams of Hinduism, namely, Vaishnavism and Shaivism about the first century before the beginning of the Christian era. The trinity represents the creative, preservative and destructive aspects and three gunas (strands): rajas, sattava and tamas respectively. It also represents an attempt to reconcile and synthesise the two main directions of Vaishnavism and Shaivism. The Vedas foreshadows the Trinity. Brahma owes its origin to the Vedic concept of Prajapati, the creator. Brahma has no cult, no temples and worshippers simply because as a creator he has no direct bearing on the personal lives of the Hindus. As a creator he has set in motion the abstract principles by which the entire creation operates. These laws of operation, already in force, are eternal and unchangeable. Hence, Brahma is seldom worshipped as a god and has no followers.

Brahma

Brahma is represented with four faces and four hands and a blowing beard, as a grand old and wise god. In one hand he holds a conch shell, a rosary in another, a water jug in the third and the Veda in the fourth. Saraswati, the goddess of learning is his consort and Hansa, the swan is his mount. He created this universe and every cycle of creation lasts one of Brahma's days which is equivalent to 2,160,000,000 years. At the end of such a cycle this whole universe including Brahma himself, is dissolved, and it is called Mahapralaya or Great Dissolution. Then another Brahma is born and a new cycle begins. The cycle is divided into sub-cycles, known as Kalpas. An important sub-division of Kalpa is Mahayuga, and each Mahayuga consists of four Yugas, namely, Krita Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga and Kali Yuga. The first one is a golden age and lasts for 1,728,00 years. Treta is a silver age and lasts for 1,296,000 years. The Dwapara, which lasts for 864,000 years, is a copper age. The Kali Yuga or the iron age is the worst and marks the degeneration in human values and dharma. It lasts for 432,000 years. During dissolution gods, men and Brahma

merge into Brahman, the first cause. Every dissolution thus coincides with Brahma's life. Brahma is shown to have been born from a lotus springing from Vishnu's navel, or to have hatched out from the golden cosmic egg floating on the cosmic waters.

Vishnu

The second of the Hindu triad, Vishnu represents the preservative aspect. As a preserver he is the embodiment of Sattava guna and the upholder of righteousness and dharma. In his anthropomorphic representation, Vishnu is a handsome youth with blue skin and all the marks of royalty. He has four hands; one holds a conch shell, the second a chakra or discus, the third a mace and the fourth a lotus flower. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth is his consort and Garuda, half-man and half-bird, his vehicle. Vishnu is also shown reclining on the bed of the serpent Sheshanaga, with Lakshmi or Sri seated at his feet. Vaikuntha is his heaven and is built entirely of gold and jewels. There in the pools grow white, red and blue lotuses. The Ganga is said to have originated from his foot.

Vishnu is a very popular deity and is worshipped throughout the Hindu world and has thousand names, the repetition of which removes sins and bestows religious merits and bliss. He has a bow called Saranga and a sword called Nandaka. The devotees of Vishnu recognise him as the supreme being, the source of all creation.

Vishnu is there as a god in the Vedas, but his role as a great preserver is a development of later times. In the Rigveda, he represents the solar energy and is shown striding over the entire universe in three steps-

"*Three times strode forth this God in all his grandeur over this earth bright with a hundred splendours.*

Foremost be Vishnu, stronger then the strongest, for glorious is his name who lives for ever.

Over this earth with mighty step strode

Vishnu, ready to give it for a home to Manu.

In him the humble people trust for safety,

he, nobly born, hath made them spacious dwellings."

With the passage of time, Vishnu acquired new powers and attributes, and new legends and mythology grew around him till he becomes the second of the Hindu Triad in the Puranic age. As such, he is associated with grace, mercy, all-pervasiveness and the watery element, which spreads everywhere before the creation of the world. In this form he is Nara, the cosmic ocean. He is also called Narayana, "moving in the waters", and is represented reclining on the serpent Shesha and floating on the waters. A divine lotus is shown growing from his navel as he slumbers, and Brahma arising from that lotus. This posture is resumed by Vishnu after each dissolution. In the Mahanarayana Upanishad he has been described as Supreme Being with his cosmic character.

Shiva

Shiva or Mahesha, the third of the Hindu Trimurti is another popular deity. Rudra is another name of Shiva, and Rudra is one of the Vedic gods. There he is praised as "the lord of the songs, the lord of sacrifices, who heals, is brilliant as the sun, the best and most bountiful of gods". In the Yajurveda he has been described as "auspicious not terrible", "the deliverer, the first divine physician", he is "blue-necked and red coloured, who has a thousand eyes and bears a thousand quivers", and in another mantra he is called "Trymbaka, the sweet-scented increaser of prosperity". In the Atharvaveda he is the lord of the beasts, but he is fiercer. In the Upanishads and the epics he holds a very high poistion as the Supreme Being and a personal god respectively. The rival claims of Vishnu and Shiva to supremacy are reconciled in the concept of the Hindu Triad. Shiva symbolises the principle of annihilation, and dissolution, but in fact his attributes and powers are much more numerous and wider. Shankara, Mahadeva, Maheshwara, Bhava, Sarva, Pashupati Tryambaka are some of his other names. Parvati is his consort and Nandi the bull, his mount. As Pashupati he is the lord of the beasts and cattle.

In his creative aspect he is Mahadeva, Ishvara, the Supreme Lord. His supreme creative powers are worshipped in the form of the lingam or phallus, of all the divine expressions, the Lingam can be

said to be most representative of the powers of regeneration and procreation. The Lingam coupled with the Yoni, the symbol of female life-force, or the female organ, he is worshipped everywhere. There is hardly any place of worship where a Lingam is not found. Regeneration and dissolution are the two aspects of the same coin. One presupposes the other. As a Maha-kala he is a great destroying and dissolving force. As a Maha-yogi, he is constantly absorbed in severe austerities and derives his powers from them. He is naked, Digambara (sky-clad) and his body is smeared with ashes. He is also the lord of the ghosts, witches, dwarfs and goblins and is Bhuteshwara. In these forms and aspects he haunts the cemeteries, cremation grounds wearing serpents round his head and arms and a garland of skulls. Besides Lingam, he is also worshipped as an anthroponeophic god. Shiva is a complex and multi-dimensional deity and is represented doing several roles, both good and evil, in this great drama of regeneration and dissolution. He is Nilkantha or blue-throated because during the churning of the ocean for amrit, he swallowed the poison and rendered a vital service to the gods. As Nataraj, he is the lord of the dance and drama. By Tandava he accomplished the dissolution of the world. Shiva's dance stands both for his glory and rhythm of life and universe. He carries a trident and is genererally accompanied by his Nandi bull. His abode is on Mount Kailasa. He is also shown with a third eye in the centre of his forehead, which is very destructive. With it. he once reduced Kamadeva the god of love, because Kamadeve tried to excite him sexually while he was engaged in a great penance. In Shaivism, Shiva is worshipped as the Supreme personal God. Shaivism combines the Aryan and non-Aryan religious beliefs and ideas. He is father of gods Ganesh and Kartikeya.

Avatars

The concept of Avatars (Incarnations) or Descents is found in the Vedas in seed form. There we find the definite though faint indications of the descent of Vishnu on the earth in human form in order to accomplish certain objectives. The circumstances with necessitate the descent of Vishnu is described in these lines of the *Gita*—

Whenever Dharma declines, and

Unrighteousness flourishes then I incarnate
Myself, O Bharata.

I incarnate age after age,
for the the protection of the good, and
for the destruction of the wicked, and
for re-establishment of Dharma.

—The Bhagvad Gita, IV 7-8.

In the Puranas various legends are given as regard to the Avatars of Vishnu. His various incarnations, right from in the form of a fish (Matsya) through tortoise (Kurma), boar (Varaha), man-lion (Narsimha), dwarf (Vamana), Parshurama, Rama and Krishna, symbolically represent the evolution of life and society. An avatar is an embodied portion of Vishnu's divine essence in a human or supernatural form. By coming down on the earth as an Avatar, Vishnu as a preserver, performs the specific task of destroying the evil-doers and establishing and preserving the rule of dharma. In all there are ten Avatars, but the seventh and the eighth. Rama and Krishna are held in great awe and reverence and receive worship as great gods. As we have already seen, Rama is the hero of the beautiful epic poem, the Ramayana of Valmiki. Krishna is the great hero of many legends and myths. In the Mahabharata he delivers the famous song, the Bhagvad Gita to Arjuna as the manifestation of the Supreme Being. His supreme divinity further finds expression in Bhagavata Purana and Harivansa. He killed many demons, asuras and tyrants including Pralamba, Kansa, Jarasandha and Shishupala.

Buddha

Gautam Buddha is regarded as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu. It is believed that Vishnu appeared as Buddha not as a hero-upholder of dharma and righteousness, but to encourage the wicked and demonic to despise Vedas, reject cast, and deny the existence of God, and thus causing them their own destruction. The inclusion of Buddha as an avatar in the Hindu pantheon underlines the great power of assimilation and absorption of other cults and creeds into

itself. In the Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna says, "Even those who worship other gods with devotion, worship me alone, O son of Kunti, though but by the wrong method" (IX, 23). This utterance of Krishna points out how Hinduism can incorporate into itself other gods and goddesses by regarding them as the manifestations of the same Supreme Being. Buddha himself was brought up, lived and died as a Hindu. Buddhism owes much to Hinduism. But then Hinduism was much enriched by Buddhist moral philosophy.

The tenth incarnation of Vishnu Kalki is yet to descend at the end of the present age Kali Yuga, with a drawn sword blazing like lightning and seated on a white horse. He will accomplish the final ruin of the wicked and prepare the ground for the renovation of creation, and the restoration of dharma and purity.

Mother Goddess

The three great gods of the Hindu Trinity have their respective female counter-parts and spouses. These goddesses who complement their husbands are popular deities of the Hindu pantheon. Uma or Parvati is the consort of Shiva, and is the most popular of the three being the Mother Goddess. Saraswati the goddess of learning is the consort of Brahma and Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth that of Vishnu. The history and origin of Uma as mother goddess goes back to Harappan period, where many statuettes of nude female symbolising yoni and fertility heve been found along with the horned god figuirines with exposed male organ, identified as Proto-Shiva. It seems that Linga-worship and the cult of Mother Goddess was in vogue in the Harappan civilzation. Thus both Shiva and durga are pre-Vedic and non-Aryan deities which later found their way into the Hindu pentheon.

Uma

Uma is Sahasranana or thousand-named, which represent her various aspects both fierce and benerficent. Like Shiva himself, she is the mistress of several attributes and powers and reflects complex and multidimendional personality. Among the goddesses Uma is the only one who has so distinct a personality, her family

and a group of interesting legends and myths. She is Ambiku (mother), Mahamaya (great illusion), Durga (inaccessible), Shakti (female energy), Devi (goddess), Sarva-mangala (ever auspicious), Kamakshi (wanton-eyed), Kali (black), etc. She is the daughter of Himalaya mountains, and Shakti or female energy of Shiva. She is both fierce and benevolent. In her mild and kind aspect, whe is the giver of life and in her fierce and terrifying aspect, she destroys in the form of pestilence, disease and famine. As a creative and life-force, she helps Shiva in creation and regeneration; without her motivating life-force no creation is is possible for Shiva. It implies that no creatvity, whether spiritual or physical, is possible without the union of the opposing forces. She represents the female principle and Shiva the male principle. As Sati whe is the daughter of Daksha. As Chandi (fierce) she receives blood sacrifices. As Durga she rides a tiger in a fierce mood and carries weapons in all her ten hands. As Kali whe is shown with a terrible countenance. In both these aspects, she is single without a spouse. As Durga and Kail she is a goddess complete in herself, representation of all the forms and forces that destroy eviland promote good and well-being of the world.

Lakshmi

The next in importance is Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu. Her origin and history cannot be traced either in the Indus Valley religion or the Vedic literature. Thus, she seems to be of Puranic origin. She is a goddess of good fortune, wealth, abundance agriculture, and trade and commerce, and she has her own personality and traits. But as a wife of Vishnu, she does not possess much independent and powerful personality as does Uma. For the most part she is seen at Vishnu's side as an appendage and adornment of her lord. Lakshmi or Sri's origin is related with the churning of the milky ocean. At the time of the churning of the Ocean, she sprang from the ocean's foam, like Aphrodite, on Vishnu's chest which is her proper place, in her full splendour and beauty with a lotus bloom in her hand. Another myth represents her as floating on the lotus flower at the time of creation. Therefore, she is also called Padma (lotus).

When Vishnu incarnates himself as Rama, she descended as Sita, and when Vishnu was born as Krishna, she became Radha. Lakshmi as Sita supports her consort Vishnu in his struggle and triumph over evil and adharma. Lakshmi as Radha again symbolises the union of opposites which is the basis of all creation. Lakshmi and Vishnu represent the concept of unity in diversity. In latent form the Reality is one, but when manifested, it becomes many. Lakshmi can also be identified as Prakriti or Maya of the Purusha. Lakshmi is represented with four hands. She does not have temples dedicated to herself, but as a companion and consort of Narain. There are temples and temples called "Lakshmi-Narain" shrines, where Vishnu and Lakshmi are installed together as wife and husband.

Sarasvati

Sarasvati, the wife of Brahma, is the goddess of learning and speech. She is both a goddess and a river, now lost. As a river-goddess also she is still worshipped and invoked. She is the inventress of the Sanskrit language and Devnagari script, and the patroners of various arts and sciences. She is prayed to and worshipped for acquiring knowledge and wisdom. She is always shown seated on a lotus flower and playing a veena. The white peocock or a white swan is her vehicle. Her graceful figure is ever depicted dressed in spotless white, and except a garland of white flowers, she does not wear any other jewellery. She is the mother of the Vedas which sprang from her head. According to another legend Sarasvati was originally the wife of Vishnu, alongwith themselves, Vishnu gave Sarasvati to Brahma and Ganga to Shiva.

The corresponding triad of goddess Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati are said to have been originally one goddess. Once Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva were confronted with a problem of slaying asura Andhaka, who had a thousand arms and heads and two thousand eyes and feet. As the three gods sat discussing and their glances met, a combined energy in a female form was produced. It dazzled the heavens with its brilliance and was of white red and black colours. As each of these gods wanted to possess this goddess she divided herself into three forms of Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati.

Thus, they are sisters and have a common origin, but they are mutually incompatible, specially Sarasvati and Lakshmi. That is why a man can have either knowledge and learning or wealth, but not both.

Ganesha

The elephant-headed god Ganesha, the Lord of the Ganas, is one of the most popular Hindu deities. The son of Parvati and Shiva, Ganesha is the god of wisdom, success and good luck. He is worshipped at the beginning of every good work, so that it may be successful and there are no obstacles in the way. He is a great remover of obstacles. He is very wise, learned and a good scribe, and is said to have written down the Mahabharata from the dictation of Vyasa. As Ganapati, he is the lord of Ganas or Shiva's hosts. He is gentle and friendly and bestows success.

He is represented as a portly man with an elephant's head and four hands. In one hand he holds a conch shell, in another a discuss, in the third a goad and in the fourth a water lily. The mouse is his vehicle and he is shown riding a rat or attended by one. It is very interesting to know how he came to possess his elephant head. One version has it that once Parvati went to her bath and asked his son to keep watch at the door. Then came Shiva and wanted to enter and was opposed, so he enraged severed the head from his body. To pacify Parvati he replaced it with an elephant's, the first that came to sight.

Yet another legend says that Parvati proud of her son, asked and insisted Shani (Saturn) to look at him forgetting the ruinous effects of Shani's glance. No sooner did he look then Ganesha's head was burnt to ashes. Parvati grew furious and cursed Shani for killing her son, but then Brahma intervened and told her that if the first available head was put on Ganesha's trunk he would be restored to life. To first that could be found was what of an elephant.

Ganesha is worshipped universally the throughout the Hinduworld, and it precedes all other rituals. There is a legend which explains the reason of this precedence. Once Shiva and Parvati were sitting along with their sons Ganesha and Kartibeya. Then, Shiva

proposed to see who of his two sons came back first, after circling round the world. Kartikeya immediately hurried off mounting his vehicle, the peacock. Meanwhile Ganesha took round of his parents and stood before them with joined palms, saying, "you both are my whole world." It immediately pleased Shiva and Parvati. They blessed him profusely and gave him the boon of being prayed to and worshipped before any auspicious work was begun. Gajanana, Ganapati, Ganapati, Lambodara and Vighnesha are his other popular names. Siddhi and Buddhi are his two wives and Kartikeya his brother.

Kartikeya

Kartikeya, the chief war god of the Hindu pantheon, is also known as Skanda and Kumara. Once Fire or Agni received Shiva's seed, which was afterwards transferred to Ganga, and Kumara was the result. He was brought up by the planet Kritikas (Pliades), and so has six heads and is called Kartikeya. He has six pairs of arms and legs, and carries a bow and an arrow. Peacock is his vehicle. As a commander of the forces of the gods, he is interested only in military exploits and is called Kumara (bachelor), because he is not interested in women at all. But according to another legend he is the husband of Devasena, an anthromorphic representation of the army of gods. In south India he is known as Subramaniya. He was born with the specific purpose of destroying a powerful demon, Taraka, whose severe penence had made him invincible to the other gods.

Hanuman

The monkey-god Hanuman is another very popular deity. He is the embodiment of the Hindu ideal of perfect service, wisdom, speed and strength. He was born of a monkey queen known as Anjana and the windgod Vayu. Anjana was apsara who was transformed into a monkey under a curse. As soon as he was born he leapt at the sun taking it to fruit and wanted to satisfy his hunger. India saw it and to save the sun, he struck Hanuman with his thunderbolt, and he fell down on the earth. It enraged Vayu and he stopped blowing, causing great discomfort to all the beings. Indra humbly apologised to Vayu and granted Hanuman the boon of great strength and

immortality. But his immortality and perpetual youth are considered more often as a gift from Rama.

Hanuman is a great hero in the Ramayana. There are described his exploits and adventures in great detail. He along with other monkeys helped Rama against the demon king Ravana. In one bound he crossed the sea and reached Lanka in search of Sita. As a punishment his tail was set on fire by Ravana, but he with it caused havoc and conflagration in Lanka. His services to Rama were great and many. He killed many Rakshasha-chiefs, flew to the Himalayas to fetch the medicinal herbs to restore Lakshmana to life.

His form is enormous and complexion golden. His face is like bright ruby and his mighty tail spreads out to a great length. Generally he is shown bearing a mace in his hand or sitting with folded hands before Rama and Sita. Through him is expressed the highest divinely in animal form. He is prayed daily be the devout Hindus for strength, well-being and protection against evil forces and ghosts. As such, he is called Sankata-mochana or delivere from the troubles.

Among the lesser gods of present Hindu pantheon may be included Kubera, Yama, Indra, Kamdeva, etc. Indra was the most powerful Vedic war-god, but now he holds a subordinate position as the guardian of eastern quarter of the universe. Yama, the god of death and guardian of the northern quarter, dwells in Alkapuri. Varuna is another Lokpala and guards the western quarter of the Universe. Kamdeva, the god of love (Eros) is a Vedic god, but he represents not merely the urge of sexual enjoyment, but all the desires and actions in common for the general good. He is the first desire that satisfies all other subsequent desires. Rati, the goddess of desire is his wife. Then there are local village gods and goddesses which include Bhairava, often identified with Shiva, Shitala, the goddess of small pox, Hoimata, Santoshimata, Mansa, the snake goddess and others. The Grahas or the heavenly objects like the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Venus, Saturn, Jupitar, Rahu and Ketu, the planets of the solar system are also considered divine and worshipped. Out of the planets, the Sun, the Moon and Saturn (Shani) are worshipped on their own right, but others may be worshipped, if

they have malefic and adverse effect on the individual according to his horoscope. Graha actually means the power that seizes and obscures an individual's personality. As such, the evil spirits, with which people, especially children and women are possessed, and which are supposed to cause death, sickness and madness, are worshipped and offered sacrifices for propitiation.

The legendary rishis, munis and sages of old, who achieved divinity by their meritorious acts, are held in great reverence and offered worship. The "Saptarishiss" identified with stars of the constellation Great Bear and Narada, Vyasa, Valmiki, Vashishtha, Gautama, etc., come under this category. They acquired a state of godhood and divinity by their severe penances and other sacrifices. The living sages and saints are also worshipped as they possess divine powers capable of influencing men's lives and fortunes. Hindu divinity is all- inclusive and in a way, extends to the whole creation. Saints, sages and holy personages are held in reverence during their life and after their. death, because divinity found expression through them to lesser or greater extent. The more the expression of divinity through a man, the greater the reverence he is held in. Besides the cow, tulsi (basil) plant, asvatha (peepal), bada (banayan) trees are sacred to the Hindus. Certain lakes, rivers and waters are holy and sacred, and as such they are often given anthropomorphic forms and offered worship and propitiation. Among the rivers the Ganga and the Yamuna are the most sacred. Among the lakes the one at Pushkar near Ajmer and the other Mansarover, near Mount Kailash in the Himalayas are held in great reverence.

Obviously, the Hindu pantheon in quite large and rich. In Vedic times religion was in the form of nature-worship. Then there were neither temples nor idols. In this religion the elements and various powers of nature were personified and worshipped. The concept of divinity in Hinduism is based on the principle that divine beings, gods and objects uphold the universe together physically and morally, and prevent the occurrence of any kind of chaos and disorder. They are good and righteous and maintain dharma. The world owes its origin and continuation to them. Therefore, they are worshipworthy and their relation with mankind is so intimate and

friendly. For example, Varuna, as the creator of the physical and moral laws according to the Rita or cosmic order, and their maintainer, was prayed for forgiveness of sins arising out of the violation of the laws. The cosmic laws are iniolable and binding on both gods and men. Similarly, Indra, the thunder-god helped his devotees in the war against the hostile people, and also by liberating the waters by slaying the demons of draught. So, Indra, the rain-god became the national god of the Vedic Aryans.

The early Aryans worshipped and offered oblations to various gods and goddesses such as Varuna, Indra, Surya, Vayu, Agni, Aditi, Usha, Soma, Rudra, and Vishnu for abundant crops, for obtaining milch-kine, steeds and cattle, progenies, happiness here and bliss in heaven. They also prayed foı long life of hundred years and for destroying the enemy. They believed that heaven was a post-mortem existence full of effulgence, complete satisfaction, joy and happiness. But gradually the idea of obtaining heavently abode, as the highest goal of life, was replaced by the concept of moksha or final liberation. But propitiation of gods through ritual sacrifice and attainment of heaven as a reward still remained an ideal on popular levels, and a particular god continued to receive worship and was lauded as the supreme being is a particular collection of hymns, though other deities were not denied. Many gods represented the same natural phenomenon, for example, Mitra, Surya, Savitr, Pushan and Adityas represented the solar god. Vishnu also had the characteristics of the solar deity. Later they were merged into one god Surya. As far the number of the gods is concerned, it is given thirty-three in many times. For example, in this hymn this number swells to 3339 while in the other it is 33.

"Three times a hundred Gods
and thrice a thousand, and
three times ten and nine have worshipped Agni."

—The Rigveda, III, 9,

"O ye eleven Gods whose home is heaven
O ye eleven who make earth your dwelling...
Ye who with might, eleven live in a waters, accept
this sacrifice, Ye Gods with pleasure."

—The Yajurveda, VII, 19.

Gradually many gods became secondary in importance, while others became more popular, and new ones came into existence, which were more anthromorphic than the previous ones. Thus, on popular levels Hinduism is pantheistic, and henotheistic. The Hindus find the didinity expressed through many objects like a ray of the sun filtering through a prism. They may rever a lifegiving river, a god-man, a rishi, or any of the avatars of Vishnu as a manifestation of his glory. All these manifestations represent the inner divinity in external form, and help in realization of the one Reality underlying the various expressions.

Paramasva (*great horse*)

God. Buddhist (Mahayana). Considered to be a form of Hayagriva depicted with four legs and trampling the four major Hindu deities underfoot. Colour: red. Attributes: arrow, bow, head of a horse, great lotus, lotus, staff and sword. Three-eyed.

Paramita

Descriptive name of a philosophical deity. Buddhist. Applied to one of the group of twelve whose spiritual father is Ratnasambhava. Common attributes: banner with a pearl, and al lotus.

Parasurama (*Rama-with-the-axe*)

Incarnation of the god Visnu. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). The sixth avatara of Visnu (see also Rama) in which form he saved the world from an army of tyrannical warriors. According to legend, Rama, the son of a wise man, became a skilled bowman and in gratitude he went to the Himalaya where he stayed, devoting himself to Siva. His consort is Dharani. Though without his bow, Rama acted as a champion of the gods in a war against the demons and was rewarded with an exe. In another legend, Visnu took the form of Parasurama to rid the world of despotc rulers. This avatara appears in human form, with two arms and with an exe in the right hand. Other attributes: arrow, bow, knife, skin and sword. Also Parasuramavatara.

Parendi

Minor goddess of prosperity. Hindu (Vedic). Associated with the acquistions of wealth.

Pariskaravasita (*control of purification*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist. One of a group of vasitas personifying the disciplines of spiritual regeneration. Colour: yellow. Attribute: jewelled staff.

Parjanya (*rain giver*)

God of rain-Hindu (Vedic). Became replaced by, syncretized with, Indra in later Hindusm, but in the Vedas he is seen as a god of gentle, fructifying rain. May be regarded as an aditya.

Parna-Savari (*dressed in leaves*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An emanation of Aksobhya and bodhisattva or buddha-designate. Also one of a group of *dharanis* (deifications of literature). She is particularly recognized in the north-west of India. Her vehicle is Ganesa surmounting obstacles. Colour: yellow or green. Attributes: arrow, exe, bow, flower, noose, peacock feather, skin and staff. Three-eyed and three headed.

PARVATI (*daughter of the mountain*)

Origin Hindu (Epic and Puranic) [India]. Mother goddess.

Known period of worship circa 400 AD until present times. Synonyms Sakin Ahladini-Sadini: Satn. Uma. Many epithets including amba mother); Aja (she goat); Gauri (corn goddess aspect); Bhutamata (mother of goblins).

Centre (s) of cult none specific. *Art references*'' sculptures, chiefly ,in bronze but also in stone; reliefs.

Literary sources Ramayana epic and various Puranic texts.

Parvat may have originated from the mountain tribes in the Himalaya. As a goddess of fertility she is the youngest of the benign aspects of the goddess Sakti. She also appears as a reincarnation of Sati. She is the daughter of Himavan (the

Himalaya) and Mena, a sister of Visnu and the younger sister of Ganga. She becomes the consort of the god Siva and. as such, personifies the extreme example of the devoted and steadfast Hindu wife. Her sons include Ganesa and Skanda.

She is presented to Siva, the ascetic, as a beaufiful dancing girl. On becoming aware of his lack of interest, she pursues a life of self-denial until he finally appears to her as an old Brahman and takes her an his consort.

Parvati is depicted with two arms when accompanying Siva, but four when standing alone; she may be elephant-headed or carrying Ganesha as a baby, and appears in many varieties. Attributes: conch, crown, mirror, ornamented head-band, rosary and occasionally a lotus.

Pasupati (*lord of animals*)

God of animals. Hindu [India]. His consort is Svaha and his son is Sanmukha. Thought to have been derived from an earlier pre-Indo Aryan deity worshipped by the Indus Valley civilization as a horned god with three faces, sitting surrounded by animals. In Hindu culture regarded as an aspect of Siva and depicted standing upon a corpse.

Patadharini (*bearing a cloth*)

Goddess of passage. Buddhist. She watches watches over curtains and doorways. Colour: blue: Attribute: a curtain.

Pattern of the Srauta Sacrifice

Let us try to visualize a fairly simple rite as it was performed in about 800 B.C. The sacrificer (*vajamana*) may be understood to be rancher of northwestern India who wished to imporove his relations with the superhuman powers that most affected his life. He there fore invited to his homestead a certain brahman to organize with the help of three other priests a ceremony relevant to his needs.

On the day before the scheduled sacrifice, the adhoaryu priest arrived to make preparations for the rite, bringing in a cart all the necessary equipment: barley meal for the offering cakes, *soma* stems from which libations to the gods would be pressed, strainers

and bowls for use in preparing soma (a sacred inebriating drink), roasting spits and cooking pots, a hand drill for kindling fires, a painted post to which the sacrificial animal would be tied, and a goat.

After talking with the rancher, the adhvaryu staked out a site for the sacrifice, dug a fire pit, and prepared a *vedi,* or altar of earth. In addition, he laid down fragrant grass for the seating of the participants, and set slender poles in the ground and raised a light thatch roof over much of the area.

At dusk the priest led the rancher into this pavilion to begin a purifying seclusion called *diksa.* The rancher's hair and nails were cut, and after bathing, he put on a new garment. Until the fite began, he censumed nothing but warm milk, kept his fingers doubled up like those of a baby, ad spoke only with a stammer. As he passed the night watching over the sacred soma plants, he envisioned himself as undergoing rebirth into a state of purity suitable for entering into relations with the gods.

The next day, the adhavaryu with great effort kindled a fire in the fire pit. As the time for the sacrifice approached, a few neighbors gathered to watch the ceremony, though not to participate in it. The sacrifice could be watched by any Aryan, but it was essentially private in nature. The worship was the rancher's, and it was he who was expected to benefit from the ritual acts. At the appointed hour the three other priests came: the hotar, the udgatar, and the brahman. All took their seats on the grass along with the rancer's wife and the rancher himself, who was now allowed to open his fists and speak clearly. The adhavaryu poured into the fire pit a libation of melted butter. As the flames shot up, the hotar began the rite by reciting an invocatory hymn:

Agni I praise, the household priest.

the god and priest of sacrifice, chief priest, bestower of great gifts.

May Agni, worthy to be praised by sages ancient and of now, may he bring hitherward the gods.

Through Agni may we treasure gain and welfare get from day to

day and honor and most manly sons.

The fire god Agni who dwelt in all three spheres of the universe was now presumed to ascend from the fire and to carry the invitation to the appropriate gods in their heavenly abodes. The divine guests were believed to descend unseen to seats prepared for them on the fragrant grass. There they were entertained with poetry of a lofty and flatterling nature, such as the following hymn to Indra in honor of his great victory over Vrtra:

I will proclaim the manly deeds of Indra,
the first that he performed, the lightning wielder.
He slew the serpent, then discharged the waters
and cleft the caverns of the lofty mountains.

Usually the sacrificers praised the god for deeds they wanted the gods to repeat, such as the release of rain upon the earth by Indra.

The udgatar contributed by singling his distinctive songs, the samans, verses from the Rigveda sung mostly for their pleasing and powerful sound. Meanwhile, the adhavryu priest moved around and offered refreshments to the gods in the form of food and drink. As he did so, he muttered short prose formulas (yajuses) that explained his actions. The brahman did not recite at all, but listened carefully and corrected any errors made by the other priests.

The libations poured into the fire by the adhvaryu for the gods included milk, water, and soma. The oama plant is said to have been brought down from heaven to grow on certain high mountains and provide ambrosia for the gods enjoyment. Its stems were pounded on boards, and the juice was then strained and mixed with water to make a golden drink.) When the sacrificers had drunk it, they sensea a divine presence and felt posessed of extraordinary wisdom:

We have drunk Soma and become immortal:
We have attained the light the gods discovered.
What can hostility now do against us?
An what immortal god, the spite of mortals?

(Rigveda 8.43.3)

The adhvaryu offered food to the gods by placing it on the grass or dropping it into the fire, and handed portions directly to the patron and the performing priests. Butter, curds, and cakes were included in the offering. At a high moment, the sacrificlal goat was untied from its post, strangled, and cut up. Portions of its flesh were offered in the fire, but most of it was boiled or roasted and eaten by the participants. Every part had to be consumed, either by the sacrificers or by the fire. As the gods were being praised and entertained in these ways, they were often reminded, pointedly, of the needs and hopes of the generous.

When the ritual was completed, the satisfied gods returned to their abodes. The fee for the service (the *dakishina*) was now presented to the priests. The customary fee was high-no less than a cow was considered acceptable. At this point the rancher bathed and put on his usual clothing. The adhvaryu gathered up the implements of the sacrifice, throwing some into the fire and others into the water. He picked up the strewn grass, tossing it into the fire. The sacrifice was over.

Pattinidevi *(queen of goddesses)*

Mother goddess. Hindu (Singhatese) [Sri Lanka]. A deification of Kannaki, the concort of Kovolan who, according to ancient Tamil tradition, journeyed to the town of Madurar to sell a gold anklet. Through trickery she was convicted of theft and executed, but was canonized. According to another tradition, she was born from a mango pierced by a sacred arrow. In southern India and Sri Lanka a goddess of chastity and fidelity in marriage. Also a guardian against disseases, including measles and smallpox. She is associated with fire walking rituals. Attributes: cobra-hood behind the head, and a lotus.

Pavana *(purifier)*

God of the winds. Hindu. His consort is Anjana. Also Vayu.

Philosophical Frontiers of Indian Dances

Man's soul urges and inner-drives expressed in rhythmic body mobements constitute an art form, and it is called Dance. Rhythm

and movement are basic to all creation and existence. Men, birds and beass, plants, the earth, the planets and the stars, all are engaged in a ceaseless cosmic dance-recital, as it were. Rhythm and movement is life, and its cessation stagnation, decay and death. Dance symbolizes both evolution and involution. Recent researches have revealed that distant galaxies are dancing away from us at an immense speed, some of them at a rate of 90,000 miles per second. But dancing as an art-form finds its best and continuous expression in man, whom God has created after himself. Man is destined to dance his way to higher and still higher levels of consciousness and evolution till he achieves fullness and perfect fulfilment. Fullness is a state of being when one does not see another, or hear another, or know another. Thies is a state which dance, nay all fine arts help man to attain.

The universal but unique phenomenon, known as dance, springs from man's innermost creative impulses, religious urges, emotions and sensibilites. The aesthetic foundations of this Indian art-form are laid on the rock foundations of spiritual *sadhana* or rigorous discipline leading to maksha or liberation. however fleeting and momentary in the beginning. Aesthetics as a branch of Philosophy enquires into the ultimate cause and source of dance and its emotional content and significance as thing of beauty and joy for ever. In the words of C.E.M. Joad, "Philosophy is not concerned with phenomena, but with their meaning; not with facts, but with values; not with what is, but with what ought to be; not with means but with ends". Thus, it is concerned with beauty in art, its experience and expression and values. Dance, manifested through rhythmic movements, is sensuous, but the experience of *ananda* (bliss) in it is transendental and spiritual. In Indian aesthetics rasa (mood or flavour), as the cause of ananda (bliss), is central and fundamental. It is also the essence of beauty and harmony. The ultimate Reality, or *Brahman*, both in its impersonal and personal aspects, is *Sachchidananda* (*Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*), that is, he is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss absolute. Ananaa (bliss and rasa (sentiment) are two aspects of the same Reality. Therefore, God is rasa as well. *Brahman* is the ultimate cause of all manifestation. Reality can manifest itself in diverse shapes and forms of various

splendour, beauty and grandeur, and yet remain the same. The different manifestations of the Divine are real but they cannot exist without the prior existence of That. Art-forms may be different, but they all converge on the point of rasa. It is He who manifests himself in and through all art-forms, each being reflecting a portion of his splendour, for all expressions of beauty, joy and grandeur, in Him alone are fixed like spokes in a wheel or like branches around a trunk of a tree. He is there in everything artistic and beautiful, but more so in one than another in proportion to the manifestation of his glories and divinity. The greater the expression of divinity in a given piece of art, the recher the experience of bliss and sublimity. That is why a particular dance recital may be found equal, superior or inferior to the other.

The aesthetic theory of rasa is comon to all Indian classical arts. Indian wisdom has underlined in no uncertain terms time and again that rasa—experience evoked through various arts is essentially transcendental. The artists experience it in their creation, and others as audience or spectators. Both are participants in the same sadhana; both share and enjoy the same experience. Dance is not merely for entertainment. Its delight is of higher order and serves to attain the yogic state when restlessness of the senses and the mind ceases and veils of duality are torn asunder leading to identification of the knower with the Self or Atman. The aim of all art is to realize the Reality. According to Acharya Shankara real art is that which liberates. The aim of all arts in India has ever been liberation and the growth of righteousness in man through beauty and delight. And in the ultimate analysis God is the only source of beauty, bliss and beatitude. That is why different art-forms are at their best when they express His glory. God is indeed essence (bliss) and getting that essence all become happy. "All these beings come from Bliss, after birth they live through Bliss, and they move towards and enter into Bliss". (Taittiriya Samhita, 1.3.28). In enjoyer of dance or any other art-form is a sahridaya, i.e., an intelligent, good-hearted responsive and receptive man, full of feelings.·He is a rasika full of aesthetic sensibilities and is possessed with receptive mind and heart. He virtually seeks refuge in Him through dance, etc.

The constituent elements of the state of rasa or bliss are—vibhava

(cause of emotion), anubhava (effect of emotion) and sanchari or vyabhichari bhava (subordinate emotions). These in proper combination transform the sthayi bhava (primary emotion) into rasa or bliss. Sthayi bhava (primary emotion) into rasa or bliss. Sthayi bhava are corresponding to the nine rasas or sentments: sringar (love), vira (heroism), bibhitsa (disgust), raudra (anger), hasya (mirth), bhayankara (terror), karuna (pity), adbhuta (wonder), shanta (tranquility) and vatsalya (parental fondling).

In regard to the evocation of rasa in the context of dancing, Nandikeshvara observes, "Having made the prayer, etc., the dancing may begin. The song should be sustained in the throat; its meaning must be shown by the hands; the mood (bhava) must be shown by the glances; rhythm (tala) is marked by the feet. For wherever the hand moves, there the glances follow; where the glances go, the mind follows; where the mind goes, the mood follows; where the mood goes, there is the flavour (rasa)". The enjoyment of rasa, in its universalized satate with the help of dance, liberates a person, however, temporarily from the bonds of "I ness and" and "My-ness". This state signifies release from the slavery of the senses and mind, a state of bliss and peace and liberation from the limitations of the phenomenal world. It is a state of complete indentification and yet a perfect neutrality. The spectators or audience enjoy the given rasa through identification and yet remain simply detached observers and witnesses. It is characterized by the intimate co- participation of the dancer and the audience.

Patanjali, the celebrated grammarian and the propounder of the Yoga Philosophy, has defined yoga as the "*chittavrittinirodh*" or restraint of the fluctuations and modifications of the mind. And the art of Indian dancing helps to attain and maintain this stage so that there is communion between the individual sould and the Universal Soul. It may be underlined that the yogic state is a state of forgetfulness and surrender of body, mind and sould to the will of the Supreme Being. It subdues the senses, stills the mind, burns the *samskaras* and thereby imparts an inexpressible equipoise. The balance and harmony so acquired help the spirit to soar higher and higher, above the reach of illusions and duality, in the realm of perfect bliss, rest and fulfilment "when the five organs of

perfection still together with the mind, when the reason do not function this they aver to be the highest state. This they deem to be yoga— the steady concentration of the senses. Man then becomes pure attention for yoga is both origin and extinction."

—Kathopanishad, VI, 10-11.

In the words of Ananda Coomaraswamy, "It will be seen that in all cases the dance is felt to fulfil a higher end than that of mere entertainment; it is ethically justified upon the ground that it subserves the Four Ends of life, and this view of Natya is plainly stated in Tiruvenkatachari's preface. The arts are not for our instruction, but for our delight, and this delight is something more than pleasure, it is the godlike ecstasy of liberation from the restless activity of the mind and the senses, which are the veils of all reality, transparent only when we are at peace with ourselves. From the love of many things we are led to experience of Union: and for this reason Tiruvenkatachari dies not hesitate to compare the actor's or dancer's art with the practice of Yoga. The secret of all art is self-forgetfulness."

Bharata Munis Natyashatra is the earliest extant monumental document and treatise on Indian Dance. Here the subject is delineated in great detail in the context of Indian Drama. Natyashastra or the Science of Dramaturgy is a great and compreshensive work on the science and technique of Indian drama, dance and music. Giving the divine origin of drama and allied arts, Bharata Muni says that Brahma the Creator, the first of the Hindu triad was requested by Indra and other gods to create a pastime for their pleasure and delight. Brahma pondered over the matter, went into a trance and created drama, a pastime worthy of Indra and other celestial beings. He took pathya (words) from the Rigveda, abhinaya (gesture) from the Yajurveda, geet (music and chant) from the Samaveda, are rasa (sentiment and emotional element) from the Atharvaveda. Brahma synthesized these four elements into the Natya or the fifth Veda. Vishavkarrna, the 'omnificent' then erected a splendid stage and a theatre hall, and the first drama was staged by the gods and apsaras, the voluptuous celestial dancing girls. The apsaras were born at the Churning of

the Ocean. Incidentally, the first play created and staged was "Amrita Manthan" or the Churning of the Ocean.

The divine origin of dance, drama, etc. may not be taken literally, but symbolically it signifies that these art-forms were held in great respect from the very beginning of Hindu civilization, and formed an integral part of Hindu religious, devotional and secular ceremonies and practices. For centuries dancing was performed regularly in temples before the deity as a devotional exercise and this gave rise to the office and dinstitution of the Devadasis or temple dancing girls. In those early centuries, the Devadasis were held in great reverence, and their main duty was to sing dance before the temple deity. The Devadasis were accomplished artists; they could sing, dance, play on various musical instruments and read and interpret religious texts with a touch of perfection.

The *Devadasis* (maids of the God) were actually ceremonially married to the Deity of a temple. And it was first and foremost duty of such a woman, as a wife and maid to serve her lord God in all respects. They offered their their dance and song as a prayer and oblation at his feet. They served him, entertained him, danced and sange for him, as a wedded bride would do for her groom and husband. In ancient times in South India there were temples and temples thronged with Devadasis, pious, refined, cultured, skilled in various arts and held in high respect. They danced and sang as if possessed, and the audience were transported to a very high plane of consciousness and ecstasy.

Dancing being an expression of devotional life, every dance recital is still begun with a prayer and *mangalachar* (repeating a prayer for success). Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikeshvara categorically states that, "Those who are versed in the Science of Dancing say that dancing is vulgar in which the actress does not begin with a prayer", and "those who look upon the danceing of such a vular actress will have no children, and will be reborn in animal wombs".

Indian classical dance was born and nurtured in the temple, and then a few centuries later it reached the royal courts. It took a few more centuries to reach the public platform. In its secular form it

can still be seen in the nautch performed among the Hindus on many an auspicious occasion. Conceived in dim and hoary past, the Indian dance-forms have come a long way travelling from the ancient temples and shrines to the public stage through the feudal courts. Thus, all Indian classical dances have their roots deep down in the religions urges. That is why thematically they depend amonst completely on the rich mythological tales of the Hindus.

Dance represents a beautiful synthesis of many other artforms. Different arts, independent in their own way actually have a common ground of the same blissful aesthetic experience. This aesthetic thread of rasa or bliss is the basic concept which runs through and combines all art-forms into one manifestation and experience of the beautiful and blissful. Thus, they play the dual role of beneficiary and benefactor to one another, and in the process enrich others and are enriched themselves. The artist (dancer) and the spectator share this common bliss and ecstatic experience. The spectators should be well oriented and cultivated to enjoy a given dance-recital, or they would remain outsider to this experience of joy and ecstacy. Indian classical dance pre- supposes a dancer and an audience both well oriented, initiated and cultivated so as to be possessed of the same aesthetic sensibilities forming an emotional bridge, an aesthetic rapport between the two. It is a kind of participation in an inner spiritual vision and enlightenment. This common sharing transforms a dance recital int a holy ritual, a spiritual interaction or communication.

It has been rightly observed that in Indian classical dances there is no amateur but all are preofessionals. A dancer has to undergo a continuous long and arduous conventional training and practice for years together before he or she can come before the spectators. It makes Indian dances impersonal and traditional. The dance movements, the rhythms and the accompanying music all remain the same whoever the dancer might be. There is nothing left to chance or improvisation. There is hardly any room for personal emotions, feelings and sentiments. The same dance patterns are followed which have been evolved by the maestroes of the art during the past centuries. A dance recital must strictly conform to the age old and well established art traditions. That is why it

presupposes a receptive viewer, a responsive audience, an audience well initiated in the techniques of the art. In the words of Ananda Coomaraswamy, "the exhibition of his art is altogether independent of his emotional condition, and if he is moved by what he represents he is moved as a spectator. Excellent acting wears the perfect air of spontaneity, but that is the art with conceals art."

The rasarealized and experienced both by the performer and the viewer remains the same impersonal and objective entity. It is an art concealing art, totally impersonal, objective, traditional, deliberate, and elaborate in technique and appeal. It breaks a new ground of perception; opens entirely a new vision of Reality. We all as human beings desire deeply to be released from the prison of our ego, to experience that state of being which is blissful, the condition of oneness and togetherness with the Universal Spirit. Dance-recitals help us to regain that lost heaven of unity and oneness. All aesthetic experiences arising out of dance, drama, music, poetry, etc. form the return pathway. To borrow a metaphor from poet Shelley, life is a dome of many-coloured glassess that stain and white radiance of Eternity. And dance removes this stain and reverses this fragmentation of many coloured glasses. It is indeed an encounter and ensuing possible unity with the Reality. Such are the doctrinal and philosophical frontiers of dance according to ancient Indian wisdom.

Phyi-Sgrub (*the external one*)

God. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. A form of the god Yama who rides a bufalo or a bull. Colour: blue, yellow or white. Attributes: noose, prayer wheel and staff surmounted by a skeleton.

Pitari (*snake-catcher*)

One of the consorts of Siva. Hindu (Puranic and later). A benevolent *navasakti.* The cult of Pidari probably evolved in the sixth and seventh centuries AD and is generally restricted to southern India. She is considered an aspect of the goddess Kali and is invoked in many villages to ward off evil and demons. She has most of the attributes of Kali and may also have snakes around her breasts, but may also be represented by astone.

Poleramma

Plague goddess. Telegu [India]. Associated with smallpox and offered bood sacrifices.

Prabhakari (*light-maker*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Vajrayana). One of several deified *bhumis* recognized as different spiritual spheres through which a disciple passes. Colour: red. Attributes: sun disc on a great lotus and staff.

Prabhasa (*shining down*)

Attendant god. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of a group of vasu deities answering to the god Indra. Attributes: cup, hook, Sakti and staff.

Pracanda (*furious*)

Distinct form of the goddess Durga. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of a group of navadurgas or nine durgas'.

Pradhana (*most important*)

Mother goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). One of a group of nine *navasaktis* who, in southern India, rank higher than the *saptamataras.*

Pradipatara

Minor goddess of light. Buddhist (Mahayana).

Pradyumna

God of love. Early Dravidian (Tamil) [southern India]. The son of Krisna and Rukmini, and the elder brother of Sama, Equating with Kamadeva, or Kama returned to life after being killed by Siva. In later Hinduism regarded as a avatara of Visnu with consorts including Mayadevi and Kakudmati.

Prajapati (*lord of creatures*)

Primordial being. Hindu (Vedic, Epic and Puranic). In the Vedic legends he is described variously as the creator of the world and the creator of heaven and earth. He is an androgynous being who

impregnated himself by fusing elements of mind and speech. In later epics he is the guardian deity of the sexual organ. Prajapati is also a name of the god Brahma in later Hinduism.

Prajna (*wisdom*)

Goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). Regarded as the Sakti of number of Mahayana gods, or specifically as the Sakti of Adibuddha.

Prajnantaka

God. Buddhist. One of the the dikpalas guardians of the southern direction. Colour: white. Attributes: jewel, lotus, sword, trident and white staff.

Prajanaparamita

Goddess. Buddhist. The personification of the religious text *Prajnaparamita* and the *Sakti* of Vajradhara. An emanation of the deity Aksobbhya. Also a philosophical deity, the spiritual offspring of Ratnasambhava. The embodiment of transcendental intuition. She stands upon a lotus. Colour: white, reddish white or yellow. Attributes: blue lotus, book, cup, knife, jewelled staff and red lotus.

Prajnapti (*teaching*)

Goddess of learning: Jain [India]. One of sixteen *vidyadevi* headed by the goddess Sarasvati.

Prajnavardhani (*growth of wisdom*)

Deification of literature. Buddhist. One of a group of dharanis. Colour : white. Attributes: staff and sword in blue lotus.

Pralaya-the Hindu "Armageddon"

Hinduism also talks about Armageddon (Revelation 16:16) as Pralaya (great deluge). Very descriptive details of Pralaya are written in the Srimad Mahabhagavata. As far as Hinduism is concerned. Pralaya or deluge is not something that shows despair but hope. Hindus firmly believe in the Law of Karma and Pralaya as a necessity to take care of the collective Karmas of multitudes of people. Even the Yadavas (blood-relations of Lord Krishna) and Krishna himself were wiped out of this earth when their actions

warranted their extinction from the earth.

Hindus also believe in the cyclical nature of "creation and annihilation" of the Universe. In the Code of Manu, it is written that the Universe and creation come and go in a cyclical order. There is no end to this drama of "creation and annihilation of the universe." There are four periods of time called Yugas. These four Yugas are: Krita Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dvapara Yuga, and Kali Yuga. The total time-period of the four Yugas is called a Kalpa. At the end of each Kalpa or Kali Yuga, the universe is destroyed by Pralaya or great floods. Then another Kalpa begins. It is said that at the time of Pralaya, Lord Vishnu will take his 10th Avatar known as Kalki (the man on the white horse). Lord Krishna lived in Dvapara Yuga. We are now living in Kali Yuga. It is said that the state of affairs will be be worst in Kali Yuga.

Pramudita (*delighted*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Vajrayana). One of several deified *bhumis* recognized as different spiritual spheres through which a disciple passes. Colour: red. Attributes: jewel and staff.

Pranasakti

Goddess. Hindu. A terrifying deity ruling the 'centres of physical life'. She stands upon a lotus. Attribute: a cup filled with blood.

Pranayama

Pranayama plays a very important role in Raja Yoga. There is no proper definition of Prana. Some say it means "vital currents" in the body. However, Prana does not mean Breath or Thought. Ayama means Restraint. So Pranayama means restraint of vital currents in the body. Some define Prana as the absolute link between *absolute conscionusness* and the mind and the body. The intimate relationship that exists amongst Prana, Mind, Thought and Breath is utilized by different schools of yoga. In some parts of Raja Yoga, *chitta vritti* or mental vibrations are controlled by will power and Prana indirectly comes under the control of the mind.

Breath is not Prana, but sages have found a direct connection between the two. Sage Patanjali says in the *Yoga Sutra*,

"Regulation of breath control or control of Prana is the stoppage of inhalation and exhalation." In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna explains Pranayama in a very elaborate way. Some offter Prana (outgoing breath) in Apana (incoming breath) and Apana in Prana, restraining the passage of Prana and Apana, absorbed in Pranayama. the Gita gives an image of two snakes both devouring each other and attaining a stage of nothingness in the above simile. Anyway, the first step in Pranayama is rhythmic breathing.

By controlling the motions of lungs and respiratory organs, one can indirectly control Prana that is vibrating inside all of us. Some practise a kind of Pranayama called Puraka (filling in). Some practise a kind of Pranayama. Called Rechaka (emptying). Some practise Kumbhaka, where the breath is held in the body. Usually the practice of Pranayama is a combination of Puraka, Kumbhaka, and Rechaka methods. There are several types of Pranayama. Basically they are divided into Adhama, Madhyama and Uttama. This division is according to the time difference in the Puraka, (filling in) period. The ratio of time between PurakaKumbhaka, and Rechaka in all these three methods is 1:4:2. Sagarbha Pranayama is that Pranayama which is done along with the japa of Mantra like Gayatri or Pranava (Aum). Kriya Yoga is the best Pranayama method, taught by Hindu saints. Rhythmic breathing is the balance act between Puraka, Kumbhaka and Rechaka stages.

Deep-breathing exercise are not Pranayama. Those exercises can be done by anyone at any time. *Pranayama* should be practised under the guidance of a very competent Guru. Pranayama should not be done by reading a book or listening to a narration. The body has to be conditioned to accept the power that is generated within it by the control of Prana. Proper dietetic control is also necessary to achieve better results. Usually *Pranayama* is practises by the aspirant sitting in *Padmasana* (lotus posture). It can also be paractised in *Shavasana* (dead-body posture).

Hamsa of Baby Pranayama is the easiest of all types of *Pranayamas*. It can be done by anyone, anywhere and under any conditions. *Hamsa* means swan. It signifies that this method is as pure and as tranquil as a swan. *In this method, the aspirant watches*

the incoming breath (which makes the sound Ham) and the out-going breath (which makes the sound Sa) without controlling the breathing activity in any manner. In this method, one indirectly chants the Mantra "Sah Aham" meaning "He is I", There are no negative effects on the body. It helps in relaxation and annihilation of stress in the body. The first result of this method will be dreamless sleep or Sushupti.

In the Chinese religion Taoism, there is a breathing exercise known as T-AI-SI popularly known as *embryonic respiration*. The Chinese practise this breathing exercise for long life and it has no spiritual value. In some ways taoism resembles Hindu Yoga.

Control of breathing was also practised by Sufis-the Uslim mystics. The technique of Dhikr resembles some of the Hindu breathing exercises. Even in Christianity there are some evidences of using breathing for spiritual enlightenment.

Pranidhanaparamita

Philosophical deity. Buddhist. Spiritual offspring of Rainasambhava. Colour: blue . Attributes: jewel and sword on blue lotus.

Pranidhanavasita (*control of abstract contemplation*)

Minor godde Buddhist. One of a group of *vasitas* onifying the disciplines of spiritual regeneration. Colour: yellow. Attributes: blue lotus and jewelled staff.

Prasannatara (*the gracious Tara*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). Regarded as a form of Ratnasambhava who tramples on Hinud gods including Indra, Brahma, Rudra and Upendra. Colour: yellow. Carries a large Variety of attributes. Three-eyed.

Prasuti

Goddess. Hindu. The daughter of Svayambhuva Manu and one of the consorts of Daksa.

Pratibhanakuta (*excellent intelligence*)

God. Buddhist, A bodhisattva or buddha-designate. Colour: yellow or red. Attribute: sword on lotus.

Pratibhanapratisamvit

Goddess of context analysis. Buddhist (Vajrayana). One of a group of four Colour: green. Attributes: three-pronged staff and bell.

Pratisamvit (*analytical science*)

Generic name for four goddesses. Buddhist (Vajrayana). The personifications of logical analysis.

Pratyangira (*whose speech is directed westward*)

Goddess of terrifying aspect. Hindu. She rides upon a lion. Attributes: cup, drum, Flaming hair, snake noose and trident.

Pratyusa (*scorching*)

Attendant god. Hindu-Epic and Puranic).

One of a group of *vasu* deities answering to the god Indra. Attributes: hook, knife, *Sakti* and sword.

Prithivi

See Prthivi.

Priti (*pleasure*)

Goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A daughter of Daksa and consort of the god of love Kamadeva. One of twelve Saktis associated with the god Visnu in his varous incarnations.

Priyadarsana (*pleasant to the eye*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). An attendant of Buddhakapala.

Prsni

Primordial earth goddess. Hindu (Vedic). The so-called 'dappled cow' of the Rg Veda. She is also perceived as the brightly coloured soma stalk and is linked with a male counterpart. also Prsni, the

dappled bull of the sun.

Prthivi (*earth mother*)

Origin Hindu (Vedic) [India]. Mother goddess of earth.

Known period of worship circa 1500 BC and probably earlier through to present day.

Synonyms Bhudevi.

Centre (s) of cult none specific.

Art references sculptures in bronze and other metals; stone reliefs, etc.

Literary sources Rg Veda and other texts including the Atharav-*veda.*

In Vedic literature Prthivi is the female aspect of the creator god Dyaus Pitar. The two formed the once inseparable primordial cosmos unti-separated by the god Varuna. According to one illogical legend of Prthivi's genealogy, she was the daughter of Prithu who had granted the blessing of life on earth and who, in her turn, had emerged from the arm of the corpse of King Vena.

Prthivi is a chthonic or earth goddess with whom the sky god Dyaus couples when he fertilizes her with rain. She is said to kiss the centre of the world and she symbolizes the eternal patience and resilience of the earth, permitting herself to be abused without rancour. She is also a vegetation goddess, the source of all plant life. In some legends Prthivi is perceived as the consort of the rain god Indra, who protects her, and of lesser-known creation deities including Parjanya, Prajapait and Visvakarma. Vishnu strides over her body. As the inseparable partner of Dyanus she is rarely addressed alone, though in the Atharva-veda Dyaus is not mentioned. Usually the pair are referred to as Dyavaprthivi. Though the goddess was present in early Indian culture, she persists into late Hinduism and may be associated with Vishnu as one of the personifications of his *Sakti.*

Many Hindus worship Prthivi at dawn and before ploughing and sowing. In the Punjab, the first milk from a cow is offered to the

goddess by allowing it to soak into the earth. With similar sentiment a dying man may be laid on the earth to be received by Prthivi.

Prthu (*broad*)

Creator god. Hindu (Vedic). The head of the solar pantheon who introduced agriculture to the human race and who, in later Hinduism, is identified as an avatara of Vishnu.

Pukkasi

Goddess of terrifying appearance.

Buddhist (Vajrayana) and Lamasist [Tibet]. One of a group of gauri. Colour: yellowish white or blue. Attribute: water-jar.

Punarvasu

Minor goddess of fortune. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A benevolent naksatra; daughter of Daksa and wife of Candra (Soma). Concerning with restoring lost or stolen property.

Punitavati (*purified*)

Local goddess. Hindu. Worshipped at Karaikkal near Ammaiyar. The deification of a Brahman businessman's wife.

Puranai (*fullness*)

Mother goddess. Dravidian (Tamil) [southern India]. A *navasakti* and one of the consorts of Aiyanar.

Puranas and Srimad Bhagavatam

The Puranas are religious stories which expound truths. Just like the parables told by Jesus Christ, these stories are told to common folk to make them understand the higher truths of life. According to Jesus Christ, the mysteries of the universe were revealed to those who are spiritually awake but to others those mysteries have to be explained in parables. In that note, Puranas can be called *The Vedas of the Common Folk* for they present all the mysteris, through myth and legend.

The word *Purana* means ancient. The *Puranas* always stress

devotion to God. Almost all *Puranas* deal with the creation and destruction of the Universe, the genealogy of the gods and saints and details about the Solar and Lunar dynasties. Some of the them like *Mahabhagavatam* have description of future events in similarity with Christian Revelaltion.

Among the large number of Puranas 18 are called major Puranas or Mahapuranas... Each of these provides a list of all the 18 Puranas including itself but the names in the list in some Puranas slightly vary. So much so we have a list in some Puranas slightly vary. So much so we have a list of 20 major Puranas. Out of 20 Puranas, six are addressed to Lord Vishnu, six are addressed to lord Siva and six are addressed to Lord Brahma. Puranas are written in "Question and Answer" form. They consist principally of stories about Hindu gods, goddesses, supernatural beings, seers and men. The Puranas do not have a specific date of composition, but some say that the date of composition started from the sixth century A.D.

There are the 20 most important Puranas The six Puranas addressed to Lord Vishnu are 1. Vishnu Purana 2. Narada Purana 3. Srimad Bhaghavata Purana 4. Garuda Purana 5. Padma Purana 6. Varaha Purana.

The six Puranas addressed to Lord Siva are 1. Matsya Purana 2. Kurma Purana 3. Linga Purana 4. Vayu Purana 5. Skanda Purana 6. Agni Purana.

The six Puranas addressed to Lord Brahma are 1. Brahma Purana 2. Brahmanda Purana 3. Brahma-Vaivasvata Purana or Brahma-Vaivarta Purana 4. Markandeya Purana 5. Bhavishya Purana 6. Vamana Purana.

According to many Siva Purana (Saiva Purana) and Harivamsa Purana are also major Puranas, even though they did not come under the list of 18 major Punanas.

Are there minor Puranas?

Yes indeed. The minor Puranas are known *Upa Puranas*. Believe it or not, there are at least 26 or 27 minor Puranas.

They are as follows :

1. Aditya 2. Ascharya 3. Ausanasa 4. Bhaskara (Surya) 5. Devi 6. Saiva Purana —some call it a major Purana 7. Durvasa 8. Kalika 9. Kalki 10. Kapila 11. Mahesvara 12. Marichi 13. Nandikesvara 14. Sanathkumara 19. Sivadharma 20. Suta-Samhita 21. Narasimha 16. Parasara 17. Samba 18. Sanathkumara 19. Sivadharma 20. Suta-Samhita 21. Usanas 22. Varuna 23. Vayu 24. Yuga. I am very sure that the list I am giving you need not be a complete list. There still could be Puranas in Hinduism, unknown even to the great apostles of Hindu doctrine.

Is the Srimad Bhagavatam a very important scripture? It is a very important scripture to Hindus and specially to the Hare Krishna devotees. It contains 18,000 stanzas. It has 12 chapters known as Skandhas. It was written by sage Badarayana also known as Veda Vyasa. The greatest exponent of the Srimad Bhagavatam is sage Suka, the son of Sage Veda Vyasa. This book was recited to the King Parikshit, the last of the Pandava dynasty, by Sage Kuka one week before the doomed death of the king by aserpent bite. Much of the book is a dialogue between King Parikshit and Sage Suka.

The Srimad Bhagavatam consists of stories of all Avataras of Lord Vishnu. The 10th chapter of the book deals with the story of Lord Krishna in detail. The last chapter deals exclusively with the Kali Yuga, the present age, and the last Avatar of Lord Vishnu, Kalki. There is also a vivid description of Pralaya or the great deluge in the last chapter. This book is an authority on Vaishnavism in Hinduism and as I said before, the most important scripture of Hare Krishnas.

According to Srimad Bhagavatam the universe and creation came into existence because God as a sport (Lila) willed to do so. A realized devotee sees himself and all beings as part and parcel of God. According to this scripture, there are nine different ways of exhibiting Bhakti or devotion to God; like listening to stories of God, meditating, serving etc. and finally Self- surrender to the will of God.

Purandhi

Minor goddess of prosperity. Hindu (Vedic). Associated with the

acquisition of wealth and sometimes identified with Indra or other male deities.

Purusa

Primeval creator god. Hindu (Vedic). Described as the primordial being from whom the cosmos was formed, possibly the male component of the great mother, Mata. In later Hinduism regarded as an avatara of Vishnu.

Purvabhadrapada

Minor goddess of fortune. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A benevolent *naksatra*; daughter of Daksa and wife of Candra (Soma).

Purvaphalguni

Minor goddess of fortune. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A moderately disposed naksatra; daughter of Daksa and wife of Candra (Soma).

Purvasadha

Minor goddess of fortune. Hindu (Epic and puranic). A moderately disposed *naksatra*; daughter of Daksa and wife of Candra (Soma).

Pusan (*nourisher*)

Sun god. Hindu (Vedic and Puranic). The original Vedic list of six descendants of the goddess Aditi or adityas, all of whom take the role of sun gods, was, in later times, enlarged to twelve, including Pusan. He is the charioteer of the sun and a guardian deity of journeys and pathways. Colour: golden. Attributes: for lotuses.

Puspa (*flower*)

Mother goddess. Buddhist-Lamaist [Tibet]. One of the group of *astamataras* (mothers). Colour: white. Attribute: a flower.

Puspatara (*flower-Tara*)

Minor goddess. Buddhist (Mahayana). Colour: white. Attribute: a forest garland.

Pusti (*growth*)

Fertility goddess. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). In northern India she

is the second consort of Visnu, but elsewhere may also be linked with Sarasvati and named as a consort of Ganesha.

Pusya

Minor goddess of fortune. Hindu (Epic and Puranic). A benevolent *naksatra*; daughter of Daksa and wife of Candra (Soma).

Sunil Sehgal is a seasoned researcher in Hinduism. He did his M.A. in History. He became Sadhu for a decade and visited many temples, and holy places throughout India and during this period he compiled this encyclopaedia. At present he is living in Kangra and serving the poor.

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